

Deri says he was victim of 'Nazi persecution'

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — Rabbi Arieh Deri, the influential head of Israel's ultra-Orthodox Shas Party, is painting himself as the victim of "Nazi persecution" over his conviction for corruption. Israeli television reported Wednesday, Shas is handing out hundreds of thousands of video cassettes in the run-up to the May 17 general elections, branding Deri's five-year trial as "typically Nazi," public television said. "Arieh Deri was persecuted as the Jews were persecuted by the Nazis," Shas says in the 75-minute cassette entitled "I accuse!" which compares the proceedings against him to "other persecutions against Jews throughout their long history." The Moroccan-born Deri, 40, was sentenced two weeks ago to four years in jail on charges of bribe-taking, fraud and breach of trust when he was a government minister in the late 1980s.

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published by the Jordan Press Foundation
جوردان تايمز يومية سياسية تصدر عن المؤسسة الصحفية الأردنية، الراي

House demands to be consulted before Kosovo ground attack

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The U.S. House of Representatives said Wednesday it will refuse to finance any intervention of U.S. ground troops in Kosovo unless it is consulted first. The Republican-controlled House voted 249-180 to adopt a resolution demanding consultation before approving funding for ground troops. A similar measure could be introduced in the Senate as early as Friday, Republican sources said.

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King announces approval of first university in Ma'an

By Caroline Faraj

MA'AN — His Majesty King Abdullah on Wednesday translated his call for identifying priorities when dealing with the country's needs into action by announcing the approval of the establishment of the first university in Ma'an, which will carry the name of King Hussein.

"His Majesty the late King Hussein used to tell me how much Ma'an means to all Hashemites," King Abdullah told a Cabinet meeting headed by Prime Minister Abdur-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh and attended by senior Ma'an officials and members of Parliament. "I consider myself as one of you, and I'm willing to arrange several monthly meetings with you in order to discuss all issues that are of importance to Ma'an," the King added.

In his address, he called on both "the government and citizens to work as one team to find the best solutions to all problems."

"I believe it is very important to establish a strong base of openness and credibility with each other, and not to

distort the relationship between the government and the citizens," King Abdullah told the meeting, which was also attended by the Royal Court Chief Abdul Karim Kabarti.

The King expressed his satisfaction with the government's work in the governorate and said: "I believe in serious and expedient actions, but with no formalities. So, let's work together step by step."

Rawabdeh reviewed all the demands and needs mentioned by the governorate representatives. The demands focused on unemployment, investment and infrastructure problems, including requests for a school and military hospital.

Rawabdeh said he would study the feasibility of constructing both facilities.

But when asked about constructing a hospital in Shobak, the premier said this was not a viable option, as such a facility would not be able to provide adequate services.

Acknowledging that Ma'an is one of the Kingdom's "less developed" areas, Rawabdeh said: "We all know that you

have problems, but we need to identify the priorities due to the fact that our available resources are limited."

Residents took up the controversial issue of privatising the Aqaba Railway Corporation, saying that such a move would put around 900 Ma'an citizens out of work.

The Aqaba Railway Corporation, with its headquarters in Ma'an, employs several hundred townspeople out of a total workforce of 1,300, mainly from the south.

Late last year 57 deputies demanded that negotiations to privatise the indebted railway be stopped.

Seeking to reassure the gathering, Rawabdeh said: "The government will not sell the railway but will lease it to the joint Jordanian-Norwegian project" set up in 1997 to establish a phosphoric acid plant at the phosphate mines in Eshidiya and a fertilizer plant in Aqaba.

At the time, government officials said the \$600 million project between the Jordan Phosphate Mines Company and Norsk Hydro would require infrastructure such as transportation facilities and

the building of a railroad between Eshidiya and Aqaba to facilitate the export of products. Production at the two plants was expected to start by 2001.

The premier said the Ma'an-based JPMC-Norsk Hydro project would lease the Aqaba Railway Corporation for \$15 million, but he did not indicate the lease period.

The leasing agreement means that railway employees could face layoffs, as the project managers have said not all the employees are qualified to be kept on the payroll.

Therefore, the prime minister said, the government will guarantee to keep about 500 employees with the new project, transfer another 500 to the potash and phosphate companies, and continue to pay the rest their salaries until the government finds them new jobs.

On Thursday, King Abdullah is expected to attend a second meeting of the Cabinet outside Amman. The meeting, to be held in Aqaba, will discuss the governorate's needs, tourism and final studies for turning Aqaba into a free zone area.



An Apache helicopter takes off from the military section of Rinas airport near a soldier resting on top of an old Albanian bunker on Wednesday. One of the 23 Apache fighting helicopters deployed in Albania crashed late on Monday some 50 km north of Tirana (Reuters photo)

NATO admits deadly civilian bombing; Draskovic sacked from government

BELGRADE (Agencies) — Yugoslav Deputy Prime Minister Vuk Draskovic was sacked on Wednesday for straying from government views, and NATO and the United States said Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic was feeling the pressure.

The dismissal of the outspoken Draskovic came as NATO pushed ahead with its air war against Yugoslavia and acknowledged a deadly misfire that Serb authorities said killed at least 20 people in a residential neighbourhood the previous day.

The announcement, carried by the official news agency Tanjug, came a day after Draskovic, a political maverick, expressed support for the stationing of international peace troops in Kosovo under United Nations control. He has also said Yugoslavia is isolated and will admit war crimes investigators.

Western countries had speculated his comments might be an indication that Milosevic was moving towards accepting their demands of autonomy for the Serbian province of Kosovo and a safe return for refugees, both policed by NATO.

The Yugoslav information ministry said Draskovic had been fired for expressing views "in contradiction with the positions of the federal government."

"It's clear that President Milosevic is isolated even within his own regime," National Security Council spokesman David Leavy said in Washington.

"It's clear that even his own top leadership believes that he has to stop his repression, stop his manipulation of the media and comply with the demands of the international community."

In Brussels, a NATO official said: "It shows that no

dissent is tolerated... It shows the nature of the regime. And it is more evidence for what we have been saying, that cracks are appearing in the political leadership."

Currency markets reacted too, pushing the dollar up and the euro down on the perception that Draskovic's fall would hurt prospects of a rapid negotiated solution to the conflict.

But Draskovic sounded a nationalistic tone after his dismissal and denied any rift.

"Maybe some people in the West believed that I could be the man of tomorrow with whom NATO could cooperate," he said. "No! NATO is the aggressor... We are victims of this blind revenge against a whole nation."

NATO on Wednesday entered a sixth week of bombing to try to force Belgrade to end a crackdown that has driven most of Kosovo's ethnic Albanian majority of

1.6 million or so from their homes, over 600,000 of them into neighbouring countries.

In the past few days Draskovic, a former opposition leader brought into the government in January, had called for "brave moves" by the leadership to compromise on Kosovo, and accused state media of misrepresenting the situation to the public.

He said he believed Milosevic would support his proposal for a U.N.-controlled Kosovo peace force.

The sacking appeared to indicate that he had decided to stick to that line, throwing a huge question mark over current efforts to find a political solution.

Russia's special Balkan envoy Viktor Chervomyrdin, who has become increasingly active, along with the United States and Germany, is due in Belgrade on Thursday.

PLO Central Council decides to delay Palestinian statehood declaration

Netanyahu claims credit for saving 'peace process from collapse'

GAZA CITY (Agencies) — PLO leaders decided on Wednesday not to declare a Palestinian state on May 4, postponing the decision until after Israel's general election, a member of the PLO's mini-parliament said.

Nabil Amr, a Palestinian National Authority official and a member of the Palestinian Central Council (PCC), said the PCC had decided to continue its discussions in "permanent session."

Asked if this meant deliberations would continue until after Israel's May 17 general election, Amr told Reuters: "Yes,

that is the decision."

The council adjourned for the night and will resume its work on Thursday morning, when a vote will be held on a draft statement recommending a delay in the declaration of a state until June at the earliest, participants said.

But participants said the council, the second-highest Palestinian decision-making body, had already agreed on the broad principles of the statement.

"All participants accepted the idea of a delay until after the Israeli elections [on May 17]," said Marwan Barghouti, the

West Bank leader of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction of the PLO.

"But there are differences of opinion over whether we should fix a new date or leave the question open," he told AFP.

The 124-member body has been meeting since Tuesday to consider a long-standing pledge by Arafat to proclaim a state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip on May 4, when interim peace deals with Israel expire.

The council, which was meeting for the second day in Gaza City, is also expected to set up a committee tasked with

drawing up a constitution for a Palestinian state, in the belief that its creation is simply a matter of time.

Arafat signalled in a speech to the PCC on Monday that the time was no longer right after Washington urged Israel and the Palestinians to aim for a negotiated final peace deal within a year.

The retreat was also determined by a desire not to play into the hands of right-wing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the run-up to Israel's May 17 election.

(Continued on page 2)

Aides battle Netanyahu bid to close Orient House before polls

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (Agencies) — Top Israeli security officials are fighting demands by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to close key Palestinian offices in Arab east Jerusalem before May 17 national elections, Israeli news media reported on Wednesday.

Netanyahu on Wednesday said Palestinian officials have until early next week to evacuate their offices at Orient House.

Netanyahu's deadline — Monday morning, 10 a.m. (0700 GMT) — was the first he had set since last week, when he ordered the closure of three offices at Orient House in Arab east Jerusalem.

Netanyahu promised to shut Orient House when he was elected in 1996 but the office building remained open. Now, 18 days before he faces reelection, Netanyahu said the offices must be closed down.

"We decided to close Orient House and it will be so, the offices will be closed," Netanyahu said after a meeting with the diplomatic corps. He said the Palestinians had asked for two weeks notice, but that was "totally unjustifiable."

"I think that they are very

busy preparing the contents, so to speak, so it would appear that the place is clean" of incriminating material, he said.

According to the reports, Netanyahu was angered by a decision Tuesday by Public Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani to give Palestinian lawyers additional time to challenge a government decision last week to close three offices in Orient House, the controversial PLO headquarters in Jerusalem.

In a related development, a senior aide to Netanyahu acknowledged Wednesday that he had held months of unpublished talks about Jerusalem issues with the head of Orient House, Faisal Husseini, even as the prime minister waged his campaign to close the PLO office.

Michael Eitan, a deputy minister without portfolio from Netanyahu's Likud Party, said he met frequently with Husseini "to reduce tensions and improve the well-being of all the residents of Jerusalem."

Netanyahu's government charges that the offices in Orient House operate on behalf of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) in violation of agreements

restricting the Authority's activities to parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

"Netanyahu is pressing for the closure of the Orient House offices before the elections and is willing to bend the rules and regulations to achieve this," the Maariv newspaper quoted an unnamed senior public security ministry official as saying.

Attorney General Eliyavim Rubinstein has also publicly criticised the crackdown on Orient House, saying it was politically unwise.

The prime minister also reportedly objects to a planned meeting this week between Kahalani and PNA negotiator Saeb Erekat to discuss the Orient House dispute.

Netanyahu has made alleged Palestinian threats to Israeli control over Jerusalem a central theme of his reelection campaign.

Israel occupied east Jerusalem in 1967 and illegally annexed it as part of the Jewish state's "eternal capital." Palestinians hope to make the sector, now home to 200,000 Arabs and 160,000 Jews, the capital of a future state of their own.

(Continued on page 2)

U.S. to revise sanctions against Iran, Libya, Sudan

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The United States is to revise its unilateral trading sanctions so they will not cover food and medicine in a move that will likely benefit Iran, Sudan and Libya, a senior State Department official said on Wednesday.

The move was widely seen as an easing of unilateral U.S. administrative sanctions applied to countries Washington believes are state sponsors of terrorism.

The revision to the sanctions, to be announced by President Bill Clinton, means that U.S. companies could apply for licences to export food, medicine and medical supplies to those three countries, exports which are now forbidden under the terrorism sanctions.

"Only in extraordinary circumstances would such sales be denied," U.S. Undersecretary of State for Economic, Business and Agricultural Affairs Stuart Eizenstat told reporters in a telephone call.

Those circumstances include the affected country being in armed conflict with the United States or its allies and a high probability of the food and medicine being diverted from civilians to military or paramilitary groups engaged in terrorism, Eizenstat said.

Senator Dick Lugar, who last month introduced two bills to reform the way the United States applies unilateral sanctions, welcomed the move.

"I do not believe that food and medicine should be used as a tool of foreign policy," Lugar said in a written statement. Lugar's bills would exempt all agricultural products from unilateral sanctions and impose a two-year limit on sanctions, unless Congress or the president reauthorises them.

Eizenstat insisted the revision was not meant to signal a change in U.S. policy towards Iran, Sudan or Libya, but rather a general shift in attitude toward sanctions.

"We generally now see that sales of food, medicine and other human necessities don't generally enhance a nation's military capacities or their ability to support terrorism," Eizenstat said.

"Indeed, moneys spent on agricultural commodities and products would not be available for other less desirable uses like weapons of mass destruction and supporting terrorism," he said.

He specifically denied that

the change was designed to reward Libya for turning over the two suspects in the Lockerbie bombing case, maintaining that the revisions had been in the works for several months.

The revision does not apply to three other countries the U.S. believes support terrorism — Iraq, North Korea and Cuba — which fall under either U.S. legislative restrictions or multilateral sanctions.

Commodities that it will now be possible for American firms to sell to Iran, Libya and Sudan include wheat, corn, fodder, rice, soy, soy beans, meat, fish and baby food and formula.

Eizenstat stressed that the revision would help the ailing U.S. agricultural industry as the three countries, notably Iran, represent a huge potential market for American produce.

(Continued on page 7)

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Jordanian, Syrian officials discuss easing border traffic

AMMAN (R) — Jordanian and Syrian security officials will meet on Wednesday to discuss easing travel for their citizens in an effort to put the seal on better relations after years of animosity, officials said.

Interior Minister Nayef Al Qadi was quoted by the Jordan News Agency, Petra, as saying officials from both countries would hold the first meeting of a joint committee whose formation was agreed upon during His Majesty King Abdullah's visit to Syria this month.

Qadi said the security talks at the Jordanian border crossing of Jaber would focus on smoothing the passage of Jordanians and Syrians across the frontier.

"The committee will focus on eased flow of people and to minimise proce-

dures applied in the case of residence or entry or departure of citizens to each other's country," Qadi added.

Jordan says the Monarch's ground breaking visit to Damascus heralded a new chapter in ties after years of tension over different approaches to negotiating peace with Israel.

Syria strongly condemned Jordan's 1994 peace deal with Israel, reached by King Abdullah's late father King Hussein. Syrian President Hafez Assad stayed away from Jordan for five years after its signing.

Jordan has accused Damascus in the past of encouraging infiltration attempts by radical groups based in its territory to derail Amman's peace treaty with Israel.

King Abdullah and Assad agreed to coordinate more closely on a host of issues starting from security cooperation, boosting trade and sharing scarce water resources during the summer drought.

Officials say over 100,000 Syrians are illegally employed in Jordan, part of a large foreign labour work force.

Cross-border traffic is also increased by close family and tribal bonds, especially in the border regions themselves.

Another joint committee to resolve land disputes and access to agricultural plots along the frontier would meet on the Syrian side of the border next week, Qadi said.

Experts along with security and border officials

would look into how farmers can get better access during cultivation seasons to private plots of land which overlap the Syrian-Jordanian border, Qadi added.

Jordan also hoped Damascus would resolve the cases of scores of its citizens detained in Syrian jails, he added.

"Agreement was reached with our Syrian brothers to discuss this subject... and we expect the outcome of our talks on this matter to be positive," Qadi added.

Water Minister Kamel Mahadin was to hold talks in Damascus on Saturday to follow-up an agreement to speed-up plans to build a \$400 million dam on the Yarmouk River and to jointly seek financing for the project, officials said.

Turkey slams Cyprus over missile purchase

ANKARA (AFP) — Turkey strongly criticised on Wednesday Cyprus's announcement that it has purchased new short-range missiles to deploy on the divided east Mediterranean island.

"Turkey does not intend to let arms which have the potential to upset the balance in Cyprus and eastern Mediterranean to be deployed here," Turkish State Minister Sukru Sina Gurel said in Nicosia.

Gurel, who is responsible for Ankara's ties with the breakaway Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), made the remarks during a joint press conference with Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit who is on the island "for a rest."

"The existence of the TRNC has a vital importance for Turkey," Gurel told Turkey's Anatolia news agency.

His comments came in response to Cyprus President Glafcos Clerides's announcement Monday that his government had found an alternative missile system to the Italian Aspid-330 system whose sale was blocked by Rome last year. Clerides did not name the missiles, but said they were "of better quality" than the Aspid system, which has a range of 18 kilometres.

Cyprus signed a contract for the Italian Aspid-330 missiles in 1996, but Italy refused to complete the order because of concerns about Cypriot plans to deploy the advanced Russian-made S-300 missile system which has a range of 150 kilometres.

When Nicosia abandoned its S-300 plan, which triggered threats of military strikes from Ankara, Moscow newspapers reported that it might buy the Russian short-range Tor-M1 missile system, which has a range of 27 kilometres.



A Lebanese policeman escorts a woman, who identified herself as Marie Weizman, to Lebanese chief prosecutor, Adnan Adoum, on Wednesday in Beirut. Judicial officials said the Israeli woman in her 50s was arrested in the southern port city of Tyre on suspicion of spying, after she apparently travelled from her home town of Nazareth in northern Israel to Lebanon (AFP photo)

Israeli court orders army to clarify links to Lebanese militia

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israel's high court has ordered the government to clarify its relationship with the South Lebanon Army (SLA), a proxy militia fighting alongside Israeli troops in an occupied buffer zone in Lebanon, officials said on Wednesday.

The ruling on Tuesday marked an unprecedented legal challenge to army claims that the SLA operates independently in the so-called "security zone" and that Israel can thus not be held accountable for its actions.

The court made its demand in response to petition filed by the Israeli Association for Civil Rights in favour of four Lebanese held in the SLA's Al Khiam prison in occupied south Lebanon.

The state was given 45 days to respond to the court order.

Israeli human rights lawyers have been seeking access to or the release of the four Lebanese, two of whom are minors.

The government, in its submission to the court, said, "Israel has no effective control in south Lebanon; the SLA is not subordinate to the IDF

[Israel Defence Forces] and Israel does not run the Al Khiam prison."

Justice Shlomo Levine told the state's attorney that he had "failed to make clear the essence of the relationship between Israel and the SLA" and demanded further information.

Press reports say the SLA is financed, armed and trained by the Israeli army. According to a statement issued to the court by Brigadier General Eli Amitai, Israel's army's liaison officer with the SLA, Israel has more than 1,000 soldiers in south Lebanon and the SLA has some 2,500 fighters.

"The IDF and the SLA do coordinate their activities... [but] the SLA has its own judgement and sometimes it conducts military activity contradictory to Israel's security policy," Amitai said.

Israel has occupied parts of south Lebanon since 1985 with the declared aim of preventing attacks on its northern towns and villages by Palestinian and Islamist guerrillas.

Since 1985, the army and SLA have held a 15-kilometre wide buffer zone.

PLO Council decides to delay declaration

(Continued from page 1)

Netanyahu, who had threatened to annex areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip if Palestinians declared independence, claimed credit for forcing Arafat to back down on his statehood plans and said this had "saved the peace process from collapse."

"Today he backed down. He backed down because he knows we won't give him what he wants, he knows that as long as I'm prime minister a Palestinian state will not be established," he told Channel Two television.

Israeli voter surveys show Netanyahu in a close race with the more dovish Ehud Barak, his main challenger whose Labour Party forged the initial Oslo accords with Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organisation in 1993.

The United States, the European Union and Arab states had urged Arafat to defer a declaration in order not to influence the outcome of Israel's election and possibly wreck any prospect of reviving the stagnant peace process.

"We don't have to consecrate our state because we are already practising it on the

ground," Arafat told the assembly, according to the official Palestinian news agency Wafa.

The White House on Tuesday said it was ready to help launch accelerated permanent peace talks between Israel and the PLO after the election, with the aim of an agreement within a year.

It said it was prepared to convene a trilateral conference to advance the peace process six months after the Israeli election.

Netanyahu said he accepted the invitation to the conference, in principle.

Aides battle bid to close Orient House

(Continued from page 1)

Palestinian officials deny that the offices targeted for closure act on behalf of the PNA, and note that Orient House has been operating since well before the 1993 Oslo peace accords which created the self-rule government.

A lawyer for Orient House, Javad Boulos, lodged an appeal

against the closure orders on Tuesday and Kahalani granted him an initial one-week delay to produce documentation proving the offices are not illegal.

Israeli television reported that Netanyahu called Kahalani three times Tuesday, first to object to granting Boulos any delay and secondly to complain about the planned meeting with Ezerkat.

In an interview on Israel Radio

Wednesday, Kahalani acknowledged having had "frequent discussions" on the issue with Netanyahu but insisted the government decision to close some Orient House offices would be carried out.

He added, however, that this could not take place until after an expected appeal of the decision to Israel's supreme court, a procedure which could take weeks.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Prince Faisal opens aviation conference

SHARM AL SHEIKH (Petra) — HRH Prince Faisal on Wednesday opened a regional conference on aviation at Sharm Al Sheikh in Sinai organised by the Royal Wings (a subsidiary of the Royal Jordanian) by underlining the importance of regional airlines in promoting tourism in the Middle East. In his address, Prince Faisal urged airlines operating in the region to exert joint and serious efforts towards attracting tourists to the Middle East. The meeting is attended by more than 200 delegates representing the tourism industry, air transport companies, financial institutions and government agencies responsible for civil aviation in the Middle East.

Prince Hassan stresses Jordan's role in Arab causes

AMMAN (Petra) — HRH Prince Hassan on Wednesday said Jordan has always remained an active member of the Arab Nation and totally committed to its causes despite all the attempts to offend it and its leadership. In a lecture on "international political blocs at the threshold of the next millennium," which he delivered at the Royal War College, Prince Hassan stressed the need for closer inter-Arab cooperation and coordination in the face of growing regional blocs. Prince Hassan, who was addressing participants in a training programme conducted by the college, said the latest tours by His Majesty King Abdullah to sister Arab countries were aimed at strengthening inter-Arab coordination and cooperation, and enhancing Arab solidarity and common Arab work.

U.N. places water, sanitation contracts on hold

BAGHDAD (AFP) — A large proportion of the contracts for water and sanitation facilities submitted by Baghdad to the U.N. Sanctions Committee have been put on hold. The U.N. office of the Iraq programme said Wednesday. In all, nearly eight per cent of contracts submitted under the fourth six-month phase of the U.N. oil-for-food programme have been put on hold, while nearly six per cent of contracts in the fifth phase are still on hold.

Saudi executes three convicted child rapists

DUBAI (R) — Saudi Arabia on Wednesday executed three Saudi men convicted of abducting and raping two young boys, state television reported. It quoted an interior ministry statement as saying the three men committed their crime under the influence of alcohol. The statement also said the three men had a record of previous criminal offences.

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Thursday Programmes

18:00 children's programme — Lucky Luke
19:00Le Journal
19:15French programme
19:30News headlines
19:33French programme
20:00 Museums Around the World
20:30 Dr. Quin, the Medicine Woman
21:15Just the Job
21:30Encounter
22:00News in English
22:30 Feature film — Change of Heart

Friday Programmes

18:00The Pink Panther
18:10The Flintstones
18:30Mirror, Mirror
19:00Le Journal
19:15 Great Moments in Science and Technology
19:30News headlines
19:33French programme
20:30 Star Trek — The Next Generation
21:15Galaxy
22:00News in English
22:20Millennium

PRAYER TIMES

03:23Fajr
04:48(Sunrise) Duha
11:33Dhuhr
5:12Asr
8:18Maghreb
4:43Isha

CHURCHES

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

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4624590

Terra Sancta Church Tel.

4622366

Anglican Church Tel.

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St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox Church Tel.

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Amman International Church Tel.

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German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel.

5688404

The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel.

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Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tel.

4654932

St. John the Baptist at De la Salle College Tel.

5661757

Church of the Annunciation Tel.

4637440

Greek Orthodox Church Tel.

4646138

Church of Presentation, Sweetfish Tel.

5920146

The United Catholic Church Tel.

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The English-Language Catholic Parish Tel.

4614190

Evangelical Free Church Tel.

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The Armenian Catholic Church Tel.

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The Armenian Orthodox Church Tel.

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WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

Moderate to fine weather con-

ditions will prevail during the weekend with winds north-

westerly moderate to active. In

Aqaba, it will be warm, winds

northwesterly moderate, and seas

calm.

Amman14/27

Aqaba17/33

Deserts13/31

Jordan Valley17/33

Yesterday's high temperatures:

Amman 27, Aqaba 34.

Humidity readings: Amman

27 per cent, Aqaba 25 per

cent.

Following are the tempera-

tures expected today in the fol-

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Ajloun14/20

Jerash14/27

Um Qays19/31

Madaba15/28

Petra12/25

Dead Sea17/34

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Civil Defence Emergency199

Rescue Police 192, 4621111, 4637777

Fire Brigade4617101

Blood Bank4775121

Highway Police5343402

Traffic police4896390

Public Security Dept.4630321

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Price Complaints5661176

Water & Sewage Complaints 489467

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plaints4787111

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Radio Jordan4774111

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J. Electricity Authority 5815615

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phone 44 (52700). Information on

Royal Wings flights can be sup-

plied on phone 4875201-5

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights

08:15Sanaa (RJ)

09:05Dhahran, Riyadh (RJ)

09:05Bombay (RJ)

09:25Beirut (RJ)

09:30New Delhi (RJ)

09:40Muscat, Dubai (RJ)

09:45Doha, Bahrain (RJ)

10:05Colombo (RJ)

15:00 New York, Amsterdam (RJ)

16:30London (RJ)

17:50Kuwait (RJ)

18:10Athens (RJ)

18:20Bangkok, Calcutta (RJ)

18:45 Abu Dhabi, Al 'Ain (RJ)

22:25Paris (add) (RJ)

Turkey slams Cyprus over missile purchase



Prince Ali delivers invitation to Lahoud during first official visit to Lebanon in 25 years

BEIRUT (Agencies) — His Royal Highness Prince Ali Ben Al Hussein on Wednesday made the first official visit to Lebanon by a member of the Royal Hashemite Family in three decades.

He delivered a message from His Majesty King Abdullah to Lebanese President Emile Lahoud inviting him to visit Jordan. Lahoud expressed appreciation of the King's invitation and said Lebanon takes pride in its ties with Jordan.

The Jordan News Agency, Petra, said that after meeting Lahoud, with whom he discussed Jordanian-Lebanese relations, the Prince met Lebanese Prime Minister Salim Al Hoss and other Lebanese officials.

The visit by Prince Ali, who displayed the popular touch that helped his father, the late King Hussein hold the throne for 47 years, came on the heels of a trip His Majesty King Abdullah made to Syria last week, marking a fresh start of relations between the two

countries.

"Importance will always be assigned to the Arab countries with which we hope for larger cooperation at all levels," the 22-year old prince said after touring the American University of Beirut (AUB) and lunching with students.

Ties between Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria cooled after the Kingdom signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994. Syria and Lebanon are technically still at war with Israel. The 15-year Lebanese civil war which ended in 1990 made travel to Lebanon difficult while the strain between Damascus and Amman during that period was also reflected in Lebanese foreign policy, hence the lack of traffic between Amman and Beirut.

Prince Ali, who met Lebanon's top politicians earlier in the day, saw no contradiction between cementing Jordan's Arab ties and pursuing peace with Israel.

"There is rhetoric of war from some parties but what are

they going to wage war with? There is no other solution but peace which we encourage our neighbours to make," said Prince Ali.

The Prince was surrounded by hundreds of students as he opened an exhibition sponsored by the Jordanian Culture Club at AUB and signed the guest book.

"Ali is so handsome. Look at the number of girls around him," said a student.

Students talked of his charisma. "Ali is so different. He looks so modest, so Arab," said Jasmine, who majors in political science.

Prince Ali has begun to take a bigger public role since King Abdullah became king in February following King Hussein's death.

"I plan to continue my studies in the U.S. but I will remain in Jordan for at least a year and help His Majesty (King Abdullah)," said Ali, continuing the show of unity displayed by the Royal family since the death of his father.

Syrian MB denies government has silenced them

By Saad G. Hattar

AMMAN — Leaders of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood residing in the Kingdom on Wednesday categorically denied that the government had asked them to refrain from issuing statements about the Damascus government.

"Nobody here told us anything because we do not have any activity and did not carry out any actions from the beginning," said Ali Sadruddine Bayanouni, spiritual leader of the Syrian movement. "We respect Jordanian laws and principles and hence we do not engage in any outlawed activities in Jordan."

Press reports said that Jordan had ordered the Syrian Brotherhood members in the Kingdom to refrain from engaging in anti-Syrian activities, as ties between the Arab neighbours are on the mend.

The reports claimed that Jordanian authorities summoned several exiled members of the Syrian Brotherhood, living in Jordan since the early 1980s, to warn them against issuing any statements against Syrian President Hafez Assad.

They were told they may face expulsion from the country if they violated the orders, the reports added.

The Syrian movement declined any comment, and the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood said it was not aware of such orders.

Most Syrian Islamists in Jordan took refuge here and other Arab countries after bloody confrontations with Syrian authorities in 1982. Some of them were allegedly responsible for a series of bombings in Syria in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Bayanouni is one of hundreds of Syrian Muslim Brothers residing in Jordan.

"We do not have anything to say on this matter," one official told the Jordan Times.

But officials say the Syrian Brotherhood — long a thorny issue in bilateral ties — has no official status here though several members occasionally issue press statements.

Jordanian-Syrian ties have improved since President Assad and King Abdullah exchanged visits in the last few weeks and expressed their desire to open a new chapter in bilateral ties — which soured following the signing of the 1994 Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty.

Diplomats said a Damascus-based alliance of eight radical Palestinian factions has recently refrained from criticising Jordan — a common practice over the last five years when bilateral ties plunged after the peace treaty.

The King's historic visit to Damascus last week paved the way for a new phase of cooperation between the two countries after a four-year estrangement.

Jordan to seek debt relief during King's U.K. visit

By Francesca Ciriaci

AMMAN — His Majesty King Abdullah's first official visit to the U.K., scheduled for May 11-12, is expected to rally support for international debt relief to the Kingdom and deal with a host of military and economic bilateral issues.

King Abdullah's London talks, including meetings with Queen Elizabeth, Prime Minister Tony Blair, Foreign Secretary Robin Cook and other cabinet members, come in the framework of a European tour, which Jordanian officials said will also include Germany and Belgium. The talks come ahead of a meeting in Washington with U.S. President Bill Clinton.

Officials and diplomats expect King Abdullah to seek support for Jordan's arduous bid to obtain debt forgiveness from the Paris Club of official creditors, to meet in mid-May, and the group of seven industrialised countries, the G-7, scheduled to hold a summit in June.

"Our understanding is that the situation is favourable" for Jordan to obtain some kind of debt relief from the Paris Club, said

Simon Collis, charge d'affaires at the British embassy here.

Britain "wants to continue taking the lead to help the government achieve its economic aims," he said.

With foreign debt at \$6.8 billion and soaring, Jordan won earlier this month \$220 million in loans from the International Monetary Fund to carry out a three-year reform programme and ease problems caused by decreasing exports.

In 1999, the Kingdom has forked out over \$812 million in debt servicing — both in principal and interest.

"We understand that Jordan faces a very difficult economic situation," Collis told the Jordan Times in an interview.

"This was clear from the budget presented [in January] by the previous government and from premier Abdur-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh's policy statement to Parliament [in March]," he said.

In addition to pledges of support in international fora, the [British government is] "determined to do whatever we can at the bilateral level," the British diplomat said, identifying Jordan's medium-term challenges as "water, economic restructuring, and privatisation."

"Official assistance has a role to play, but to get the sort of growth that Jordan needs, the key to the future is attracting private investments in areas such as new infrastructure, water, and other fields in which Jordan enjoys a comparative advantage thanks to its highly-skilled and cheap workforce, such as the textile sector, for example."

Collis said particularly fruitful may be a scheduled meeting between King Abdullah and his delegation and the Lord Mayor of London, in addition to a visit to the City, regarded by many as the "financial heart of the world."

On the military level, King Abdullah's London talks are expected to follow up on an agreement in principle reached last month on the supply of British Challenger tanks to the Kingdom.

"It will not be a gift, but it will not be a commercial sale, either," Collis said, expressing hope that the transfer of an initial supply will take place by the end of the year.

UNRWA'S coffers may be empty by August, say officials

AMMAN (R) — The cash-strapped UN agency helping millions of Palestinian refugees warned on Wednesday it would run out of funds in August unless donor nations pledged extra money and delivered more swiftly.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency told donor states that even after stringent austerity measures it still faced an \$8 million shortfall in its 1999 budget on top of \$25 million of accumulated liabilities from previous years.

"We expect to run out of cash in the third quarter of 1999. Even if we receive all (promised) contributions we will not have cash in August," UNRWA Comptroller Sabhash Gupta told a meeting of the donor nations in Amman.

He said unless UNRWA got an extra \$34 million this year to meet its combined deficit it

would have to impose more austerity measures...which means further cuts in services we deliver."

UNRWA depends on international donations to fund its support for Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, the West Bank and Gaza.

Agency head Peter Hansen said UNRWA had already slashed the health and education services it offers to include only 3.5 million registered refugees to meet its chronic cash shortfalls. He warned that any hint of further cutbacks would trigger unrest among refugees.

"If we discuss further contingency plans we might run the risk of creating more unrest and unease among the refugee population than we would want to," Hansen told the donors.

"Let the U.S. not bring such contingency plans out in the open."

Gupta said the agency would spend \$255 million this year — cut down from an earlier projection of \$322 million — from an expected income of only \$247 million.

UNRWA is also trying to claw back \$37 million including \$20 million of VAT reimbursement owed by the Palestinian Authority, \$11 million it says is owed by a Gaza hospital, in addition to \$6 million in the costs incurred in moving its headquarters to Gaza.

Last year, the agency's Palestinian employees staged a one-day strike and threatened further action in protest at cuts in services and salaries caused by its cash-flow crisis.

Two days left to catch Czech cultural festival

By Rana Awwad

AMMAN — For those still pitching about for some weekend entertainment, there are still two days left to catch the Czech Cultural week in Amman.

The first Czech Cultural week in Amman doesn't end till Friday, when artists, musicians and businessmen will have offered Jordan the best of unique Czech heritage and opened promising avenues of business cooperation in the future.

The event, held at the Hotel InterContinental Jordan, so far has offered a full and festive schedule including exhibitions showing contemporary Czech graphic and paper arts as well as traditional handicrafts and tunes of lively Czech folk-

lore. The Art Trio Prague has performed throughout the six-day festival, playing some classical works by famous Czech composers like Antonin Dvorak, Bedrich Smetana and Josef Suk. Music lovers have a last chance to hear them on Friday evening.

"By holding this cultural event, we hope to familiarise Jordanians to the Czech culture as people here do not know much about it," Tomas Smetanka, Czech envoy to Jordan, told a press conference on Saturday.

Members of the Czech-Arab Chamber of Commerce, representatives of Czech companies selling food as well as alcoholic beverages in addition to manufacturers of Skoda cars, porcelain items and wooden toys are attending the event to help boost trade.

"Through the display, we also seek to bolster current bilateral relations and to enlarge trade exchanges between the two countries," added Smetanka.

The auto trade formed 95 per cent of the \$9.5 million Jordanian imports from the Czech republic last year with Jordanian exports of potash and phosphates reaching a little over \$100,000.

Vodochody Aircraft Company, manufacturers of civilian and military aircraft, is participating in the show to try to find a market in Jordan. It already sells its aircraft in other regional markets.



"We think there is a good chance for us to sell in Jordan. We sell at relatively lower price compared to our competitors," said Paloda Martin, marketing director of Vodochody, showing off a large collection of photos and aircraft prototypes.

Smetanka said relations with Jordan are progressing, though slowly, mainly because of a lack of orientation among the two peoples and the absence of direct flights linking the two capitals.

"Boosting bilateral tourism requires the operation of direct flights. This is specially important as we are on the threshold of the new Millennium where Jordan is expected to host a large number of pilgrims to the Holy Land," he added.

Earlier this week, several meetings were held between representatives of trade activities from both parties where intensive contacts were developed.

"We exchanged views and we discussed means of opening new spectra for more business exchange," said Eduard Gombar, Vice-President of the Czech-Arab Chamber of Commerce.

"We are satisfied with the new connections with our Jordanian counterparts, especially that this is the first time for the chamber to visit Jordan," added Gombar.

Many Jordanians who seek medical and therapeutic treatment at world-renowned Czech health spas have to transit through a third country to get to the republic.

Czech Airlines said it was willing to operate direct flights to the Kingdom.

Disi tender to be floated soon

AMMAN (J.T.) — Minister of Water and Irrigation Kamel Mahadin said on Wednesday the tender of the Disi-Amman water project will be floated during the coming few weeks.

Mahadin, who is currently in Italy, taking part in a workshop on water services, gave no further details.

The project of drawing water from 30,000-year-old Disi aquifer in the south will entail drilling wells, the construction of a pumping station and a 325-kilometre water pipeline from the aquifer that will deliver 100mcu a year to the capital by 2005. Last year, the government said the World Bank appeared willing to

guarantee a \$730 million loans to be obtained from commercial banks to help finance the Disi-Amman water project.

Commenting on the long-delayed Wihdeh Dam on the Yarmouk River, Mahadin, who concluded a several-day visit to France to examine its experience in water projects, told the Jordan News Agency, Petra, that the designs and documents of the "strategic" project is ready for implementation.

The JD152 million dam is expected to have 225mcu storage capacity and will take around two years to be constructed, according to the government.

WHAT'S GOING ON

FILMS

- "Caravaggio and the Baroque" at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh, on Thursday at 6:30 p.m. (The film will be preceded by a lecture by Dr. Mazin Asfour at 5:30 p.m.)
- "Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home" at the American Center, Abdoun on Thursday at 5:00 p.m.

LECTURE

- "Cervantes and Don Quijote in the Arabic Literature" by Dr. Maria Jesus Viguera at the City Hall, Ras Al Ein, on Monday May 3 at 7:00 p.m.
- Piano Recital
- Piano recital by Khalid As'ad at the Royal Cultural Centre on Thursday at 8:00 p.m.

EXHIBITIONS

- Works by Naji Al Sanjary at Hammurabi Art Gallery, Gardens Street (Tel. 5536098), until May 10.
- Water Colour exhibition by Mohammad Al Barbari at the Orient Gallery, Shmeissani (Tel. 5681303/4), until May 6.
- Ceramics exhibition by Salam Al Nouri at Baladna Art Gallery, Gardens Street, until May 9 (Tel. 5533118).
- Seventh Annual Book Exhibition at the Bishop's School, Jabal Amman, until April 29.

Five tips to better government-media relations: Frank, friendly, forthright, factual and fast

By Dima Hamdan

AMMAN — A senior government official called on his colleagues to show greater openness towards the media, but said that journalists are obliged to maintain objectivity.

"The media is becoming the prime mover of events. We have to catch up and build good links between the media and the various organisations," Iyad Qattan, Information Ministry secretary general, told participants in a three-day international executive media and television workshop.

"The major measure in han-

dling the media is the truth, and nothing but the truth," Qattan affirmed.

"But the media must present [the news] as it is, and not as an exciting story," he told the seminar, which opened in Amman on Tuesday.

Qattan referred to the media's role in unearthing two recent issues of national interest — last July's water crisis and the controversial sale of the Iraqi oil pipeline a few months later.

"The media kept nagging (about these two issues) until the government told the truth," Qattan said.

The government of Abdul

Salam Majali acknowledged a water crisis several days after trouble erupted, while the government of Fayez Tarawneh launched an investigation into the pipeline sale after dismissing earlier reports.

Twelve participants from official and non-governmental organisations in Jordan and Palestine are attending the workshop, organised by the Washington-based Centre for Development Communication (CDC) in cooperation with the private Pioneers Production Company in Amman.

Moncef Bouhafa, CDC director and chief trainer, said mass

media has become the main provider of information for the public worldwide. Hence, officials and NGO's should be more cooperative.

"Today, the media is much more of a channel between citizens and the acts of government and U.N. agencies. Most people are getting their news from television, radio or the press," Bouhafa said in an interview with the Jordan Times.

"For that reason, we feel government and U.N. people should be better equipped [with communication skills] at how to reach the mutual interests with the media."

He stressed that official spokespersons should establish constructive ties with the media to get their message across.

"When the relationship works well, both the media and the government spokesperson would gain. When it doesn't work well, both have something to lose," he explained.

Bouhafa added that giving exclusive stories to certain media is an ill-advised practice and could backfire.

"Giving exclusives to international media at the expense of the local media is not a very good strategy," he asserted.

Local journalists have expressed frustration because government officials normally show preference to Amman-based foreign news agencies, satellite channels and foreign journalists.

News on last January's change in the succession were leaked to Western news agencies operating in Amman several days before the decision was formally announced.

Most Jordanian journalists, scared by the press and publications law which bans such articles on the Royal family, stayed out of the succession fray, leaving the field to one local daily.

The workshop is discussing how to improve the message that needs to be communicated to the public, how to become more skilled in delivering the message, and the top five factors in maintaining good relations with the media (frank, friendly, forthright, factual and fast).

Misrak Elias, Jordan representative for the United Nations Children's Fund, said she was attending the workshop because it was crucial for the organisation to develop ties with the media.

"It is important because it helps to boost our message and

hopefully will improve media coverage of issues pertaining to children's and women's rights," she said. "I think everybody needs professional guidance in this regard."

The CDC will study three options to follow up on this workshop.

"We may develop it in Arabic so it will be more useful to people dealing with Arabic media, or develop it geographically by conducting similar workshops in Cairo or other countries in the sub-region, or to develop thematic workshops for spokespersons," Bouhafa said.

Militia groups oppose U.N.-organised ballot in East Timor

DILI, Indonesia (AP) — Vowing to maintain their fight to stay part of Indonesia, anti-independence militiamen Wednesday rejected plans for a U.N.-supervised ballot on East Timor's future and warned the world body against interfering in their homeland's affairs.

The fighters, blamed for a dramatic upsurge of bloody violence in the former Portuguese colony, also refused to say if they would obey a demand by the Indonesian military to surrender their weapons before the vote.

Indonesian President B.J. Habibie announced plans Tuesday for the ballot on Aug. 8 that will deliver autonomy or independence to East Timor 24 years after Indonesia invaded.

The United Nations is to supervise the poll with the aid of an unspecified number of international police advisers and poll monitors from six countries.

The first U.N. officials are expected to arrive in East Timor's capital, Dili, within two weeks.

The militiamen said they opposed the vote because it would foment more unrest between opposing sides of the independence issue.

Violence has escalated this year since Indonesia said it would consider letting go of East Timor. Dozens of people have been killed in recent weeks.

"We will fight everybody who wants to trouble us and wants to force us to accept their opinion," said John Estevan Soares, a pro-Indonesian leader.

"We reject it. We refuse it," he said of the August ballot.

"The United Nations must bear the consequences if things go wrong." The Indonesian military said it

will disarm rival groups, but it was far from certain that militiamen and separatist rebels would lay down their weapons.

"Those who have guns which can kill will have to surrender them to the police," said Col. Tono Suratman, East Timor's military commander.

The Indonesian military, which has been accused of doing little to curb militia attacks on civilians, has acknowledged that it has given arms and training to some civilian groups. But the army says the recipients are supposed to be neutral auxiliaries to the police force.

Suratman said he held personal misgivings about the ballot.

However, he said he would carry out the orders of Habibie's government.

Foreign diplomats say the cooperation of the Indonesian military with the United Nations is essential for the ballot's success.

Meanwhile, human rights activists and aid workers said violence continues to wrack the half-island territory despite the ballot plan to be signed by Indonesia and Portugal at U.N. headquarters in New York on May 5.

Doctors at a Dili clinic said it had received deaths threats from militiamen against one dozen patients recovering from bullets and machete wounds received in a wave of attacks against civilians.

Seven Dili journalists Wednesday accused militiamen and soldiers of harassing them. Earlier this month militia groups trashed the office of their newspaper.

Yayasan Hak, a Timorese human rights group, said two civilians had been kidnapped in Dili by anti-independence groups on

Tuesday.

Pro-independence activists say the vast majority of East Timor's 800,000 people want to break away from Indonesia.

However, they say a full U.N. military peacekeeping force is required to maintain security vital for a free and open ballot.

Soares said the militiamen would never accept independence and would even launch a guerrilla war in East Timor's mountainous interior if that were the outcome of the ballot.

Rival pro-independence rebels have fought Indonesian troops this way for more than two decades.

Meanwhile, international support for the vote on autonomy or independence in East Timor gained momentum with the arrival in Dili Wednesday of a senior British official.

"The U.N. agreement is the only way forward for East Timor."

It is a once in a lifetime opportunity that must be made to work," Derek Fatchett, Britain's deputy foreign minister, told reporters.

Fatchett met Bishop Carlos Belo, co-winner of the 1996 Nobel peace prize for his efforts to solve the conflict in his homeland.

In another meeting, East Timor's pro-Indonesian governor, Abilio Osorio Soares, told Fatchett that a ballot would only lead to more violence.

"If the consultation takes place, there will be a feeling that someone has won and someone has lost," said Expedito Ximenes, spokesman for the governor.

Habibie has asked Australia, Japan, the Philippines, Germany, Britain and the United States to supply aid and personnel for the U.N. team.



Guest of honour, composer Quincy Jones, kisses singer Patti Austin during a reception before the ASCAP (The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers) Film and Television Awards in Beverly Hills April 27. Jones was awarded the Henry Mancini Award for lifetime achievement for his musical contributions to film and television. He has scored over thirty films, including such hits as 'The Pawnbroker'. Austin performed a medley of Jones' compositions at the awards show (Reuters photo)

Indian 'caretaker' government worries about taking care

NEW DELHI (AFP) — India's political crisis has left a significant chunk of crucial government business in limbo, and a caretaker administration with an unclear mandate to sort out the mess.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's caretaker cabinet held an emergency session on Wednesday to discuss its decision-making powers, but emerged with only vague reassurances.

"Whatever needs to be done in the national interest will be done," said Information Minister Pramod Mahajan.

Vajpayee's Hindu-nationalist coalition collapsed in a no-confidence vote on April 17, causing the president to call fresh elections after the opposition failed to come up with a credible alternative.

If the polls are held in September — as now seems most likely — Vajpayee's lame-duck government will be in charge for at least five months.

It is a scenario that raises alarming questions about some crucial foreign policy and economic issues.

Topping the list is the signing of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), which Vajpayee had indicated he would do before the cut-off date in September.

Under the terms of the CTBT, agreed in September 1996, it can only come into force once it has been ratified by 44 states on a list of key

countries — including India — whose support is deemed essential, with this September the deadline.

Since India conducted five nuclear tests in May 1998, the CTBT has become the dominant issue in Indo-U.S. relations, along with other nuclear-related questions.

The indications are that the dialogue between Washington and New Delhi will be put on hold, especially after a U.S. decision last week to postpone an expert-level meeting on ending fissile material production, which India has so far refused to do.

Then there is the question of India's implementation of commitments to the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

"India has its international commitments. Everything cannot be put in a limbo till the elections are held," Commerce Minister Ramakrishna Hegde warned Tuesday.

"If we have to function for four to five months, we will have to fulfil our external and bilateral commitments," Hegde said.

The Commerce Ministry is currently preparing for WTO ministerial talks to be held in November in Seattle, and India was scheduled to host a consultative meeting of the G-15 group of developing nations beforehand.

However, the political uncertainty will not mean a complete freeze of diplomatic activity, as

witnessed by the fact that talks with China on a long-standing border dispute went ahead as scheduled Monday in Beijing.

The problem lies in the area of political rather than bureaucratic decision-making, as well as the implementation of crucial legislation.

Vajpayee told a conference of top Indian industrialists on Wednesday that it would be the "unflinching endeavour" of his caretaker government "to take care of the needs of the economy."

But several newspapers called for the role of a caretaker administration to be redefined, so as to provide effective governance in the months it takes to organise elections.

"When there is so much concern over how putting decisions on hold will harm the interests of the nation, it should not be difficult for mainstream political parties to work out a system that ensures the caretaker government is not unduly hamstrung," the Indian Express said.

Confederation of Indian Industry president Rajesh V. Shah also voiced concern Wednesday at the fate of pending legislation under a caretaker government.

"What happens to all the legislation which government introduced in parliament which has been approved by the various parliamentary standing committees?" asked Shah. "Do they lapse? Do we continue waiting?"

NEWS IN BRIEF

Taliban launch attack to try to recapture Bamiyan

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (AP) — Afghanistan's Taliban troops launched a two-pronged attack on central Bamiyan Wednesday in a bid to recapture the strategic city, an opposition spokesman said. The Taliban attacked opposition forces from the north and south. Fighting is ferocious, said Mohammed Jowari, a spokesman of the Shiite Muslim opposition group Hezb-e-Wahadat. "Our soldiers are trying to repulse the attack," he said. The Taliban lost Bamiyan to opposition soldiers about two weeks ago. The area is heavily populated by Shiite Muslims, militarily represented by Hezb-e-Wahadat. There was no immediate reaction from the Taliban to the opposition reports of fighting. Also the opposition said they captured Saighan district, about 50 kilometres north of Bamiyan. The Taliban reportedly have the city of Bamiyan, some 140 kilometres from the capital of Kabul, surrounded preventing their opponents from resupplying. The Taliban, who follow a harsh version of Islam, are Sunni Muslim and mostly Pashtun, the majority ethnic group of Afghanistan. They control roughly 90 per cent of Afghanistan, including Kabul and are fighting an opposition alliance on several fronts in northern and central Afghanistan. The opposition alliance comprises the ethnic and religious minorities, including the Shiite Muslims, Hazaras, Tajiks and Uzbeks.

China duplicates Taiwan's main air base for mock invasion exercises

TAIPEI (AFP) — China has set up an exercise ground which is an exact replica of rival Taiwan's largest military airport to stage mock invasion exercises, a military analyst warned Wednesday. "The manoeuvres venue was set up two years ago in China's northwestern province of Gansu," Professor Chung Chia of National Tsing Hua University, told AFP. "The military has been keeping an eye on the setup for a while," said Chung, also a professor with Taiwan's War College and Armed Forces University. Paratroopers from the People's Liberation Army (PLA), coupled with other combat units, had used the exercise ground, which is a full-size duplicate of Chiangkuang Airport in central Taiwan, in several drills, he said. China has pledged to attack Taiwan should the island declare formal independence from the "motherland." Taiwan and the mainland were split in 1949 at the end of a civil war. The Taipei-based China Times Express carried two satellite photos Wednesday showing the Gansu exercise ground was an exact copy of the Taiwan air base, home of Taiwan-made Indigenous Defensive Fighters. National Central University secured the two photos from French-launched SPOT II satellite, which is capable of monitoring objects measuring 10 metres on the ground. Chung said the PLA had used sea ports in recent exercises to sharpen their "first-strike" capability against the Nationalist troops. "They want to paralyse the island's military and administration systems 81 hours after any blitz," Chung said. The PLA launched ballistic missiles into shipping lanes off Taiwan in 1996 to dampen what they said was mounting secessionist sentiment on the island. The crisis did not end until Washington sent two battle carrier groups to waters near Taiwan.

More than 1.6 million mainland children can move to Hong Kong

HONG KONG (AFP) — The Hong Kong government on Wednesday said about 1.6 million mainland children have the right to live here following a controversial court ruling, more than four times previous estimates. Secretary for Security Regina Ip told legislators the figure had come from preliminary results of a survey carried out by the Census and Statistics Department. She also warned that such a large influx would place a great strain on Hong Kong's social services and added the territory may not be able to bear the burden. Ip was speaking during a debate on a January Court of Final Appeal ruling giving right of abode to mainland Chinese children born to Hong Kong residents, irrespective of whether they were resident or married at the time of birth. The ruling has led to fears of an influx of mainlanders, putting a huge strain on Hong Kong's social services at a time of severe economic hardship. The previous estimate for children eligible to live here was 350,000 made several years ago before the court ruling.

Two officers arrested, two plead guilty in brothel scandal

NEW YORK (AP) — Two police officers have been indicted and two have pleaded guilty in a case accusing them of accepting sexual favours and a place to nap as bribes to let a brothel operate in their precinct. Stephen Buscarino, 34, and James Gombach, 37, face charges of promoting prostitution, receiving bribes, misconduct and falsifying records. They were suspended Tuesday pending a hearing May 25. Two other officers, Lawrence Levine and James Trout, resigned after pleading guilty earlier this month to taking bribes. All four officers had a relationship with the madam who ran the brothel in central Manhattan — home to some of the city's most famous areas, including Times Square and the theatre district, district attorney Robert Morgenthau said. The officers alerted the madam to planned raids and failed to file reports about the brothel's activities, authorities said. As a reward, Morgenthau said, the madam gave the defendants thousands of dollars in cash, gifts including airline tickets and jewellery, and the sexual services of the brothel's prostitutes. Buscarino and Gombach were assigned to desk jobs since disclosures last July that two dozen cops protected the brothel in exchange for sex and a spot to goof off or sleep. None of the other 20 officers has been charged.

6 police officers kidnapped in Tajikistan

DUSHANBE (AFP) — Unidentified assailants kidnapped six Tajik police officers early Wednesday in the Yavan region south of Dushanbe, the Tajik interior ministry told AFP. Two border guards were murdered three days ago on a road leading to this region 60 kilometres from the Tajik capital. Tajikistan's deputy prime minister, Abdurakhmon Azimov, called an emergency meeting with security forces to designate a team that will investigate the kidnapping. Military sources told AFP they reckoned the kidnappers probably belonged to an armed group four of whose members were recently arrested for theft and assault. Tajikistan's Communist government and the Muslim fundamentalist opposition signed a peace agreement last year ending a five-year civil war but unrest is widespread and crime is rife in the central Asian republic.

Cambodia gets tough new anti-landmine law

PHNOM PENH (AFP) — Cambodia overwhelmingly passed a new law Wednesday that bans the possession, use and trafficking of anti-personnel landmines and imposes tough penalties on offenders, officials said.

The law, which passed in parliament by 93 out of 94 votes, will enable Phnom Penh to ratify the Ottawa treaty banning landmines which Cambodia signed onto in late 1997.

"This domestic law is very important for Cambodians because it protects the people from becoming victims of mines," said Ieng Mouly, president of the state Cambodian Mine Action Centre (CMAC).

Years of war and civil strife have left Cambodia drowning in a sea of grim landmine statistics.

"There are 365,000 hectares of mined land in Cambodia. Over the past seven years we have cleared only 6,000 hectares," he added.

There are believed to be between four and six million landmines buried here.

"This is a major step in implementing the Ottawa agreement. I hope it will be ratified next week," Ieng Mouly added.

"Nobody can lay more mines or import more mines," he said. "Just being in possession of a mine will mean one month to one year in jail under the new law, and heavy fines."

A copy of the law obtained by AFP lays out stiff penalties for the possession, use or trafficking of anti-personnel landmines.

"Any person carrying a mine or keeping a mine shall be punished with between one month and one year imprisonment and fined between one million riel (\$260) to five million riel," it says.

Repeat offences will be punished with double the penalty, it adds.

"Anybody who uses any kind of (anti-personnel) mine shall be punished with between one and five years in prison and fined five million riel to 10 million riel. Producing mines, trading,

importing, exporting any kind of mines will be punished with imprisonment of five to 10 years and fines between 10 million riel and 20 million riel."

The law makes exceptions for some kinds of anti-tank mines and the use of some devices by the military for training purposes.

And fresh foreign funds pledged last year meant the clearing process had speeded up. "At the current rate, we will finish in 20 to 30 years."

"But without more foreign aid we cannot finish the work within the 10-year period required under the Ottawa treaty," Ieng Mouly added.

Funding and help from foreign governments and donors had lowered the toll from around 600 Cambodians killed or wounded every month to about 50 to 150, he said.

However, CMAC is currently embroiled in scandal following reports here that officials from the Demining agency had falsified salary records to obtain an additional \$90,000 in funding.

Navigator asking for immunity in pilot's trial

CAMP LEJEUNE, North Carolina (AP) — A judge granted immunity Wednesday to a U.S. Marine navigator when he testifies at the obstruction of justice trial of his crewmate, the pilot of a jet that clipped an Italian gondola cable, killing 20 people.

Capt. Joseph Schweitzer, 31, had asked the military judge, Col. Alvin Keller, for immunity from further prosecution when he takes the stand at the obstruction of justice

and conspiracy trial of Capt. Richard Ashby. Schweitzer, who pleaded guilty to the charges Ashby now faces, said he did not want his testimony to result in further charges against him.

Minutes before opening statements were to begin in Ashby's trial, Keller granted Schweitzer immunity. The judge also said he may assert his constitutional right against self-incrimination at any time.

A prosecutor, Maj.

Daniel Daugherty, warned Wednesday that if Schweitzer lies on the witness stand he will be prosecuted for perjury. Daugherty had argued Tuesday that Schweitzer waived his constitutional right, which is provided in the fifth amendment, by pleading guilty.

Ashby, 32, of mission Viejo, California, was flying the Ea-6b Prowler when it clipped the ski gondola cable in an Italian Alpine valley on Feb. 3, 1998. The 20

people in the gondola died.

A military jury acquitted Ashby of involuntary manslaughter charges in March. He now is being court-martialed for destroying a videotape shot during the fatal flight. A jury of seven officers, including three pilots, was seated Tuesday. If convicted, Ashby could be dismissed from the Marines or sentenced to up to 10 years in prison.

While Ashby has pleaded innocent to the

charges, he admitted during his manslaughter trial that he hid the videotape in his flight suit and gave it to Schweitzer of Westbury, New York.

Schweitzer said he threw the tape into a bonfire.

Schweitzer, who plans to leave the Marine corps in June and wants to attend business school, asked for immunity because there is a chance his guilty plea and sentence of dismissal from the Marines

could be overturned on appeal, said his attorney, Maj. Eric Veit. Defence lawyers are concerned that if the case is reversed, prosecutors might charge Schweitzer with impeding an administrative proceeding.

"I want this thing to end, and I don't want to revisit it," Schweitzer said Tuesday during an interview. "The issue here is what will happen now. All I want is closure."

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UNRWA's predicament

THE U.N. Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which provides basic services to some 3.5 million Palestinian refugees, announced on Wednesday that it faces the prospect of running out of money by August this year unless donor states step up their contributions and deliver on time. The chronic financial problems facing this vital agency, however, seem to elicit less and less of a response from the international community, with UNRWA's budget shrinking year after year.

The agency's original projection for expenditures this year was \$322 million, which translates to a meagre \$92 per year per refugee to be spent on education, medical and social services. However, this amount has been lowered even further to \$255 million — or less than \$73 per refugee. And the agency still faces a deficit of \$8 million despite this downward adjustment. Clearly, such a low level of spending leaves dangerous gaps in even the most basic necessities of life for the refugees. UNRWA's budget has faced cutbacks and severe austerity measures for years, and without increased assistance from the international community, it faces the breaking point in the near future.

To underline this point, UNRWA's commissioner general, Peter Hansen, speaking Wednesday at a donors' meeting here in Amman, warned against further cutbacks in the budget, saying that further austerity measures might cause unease among the Palestinian refugee population. Already the agency has been hit by a number of actions by its Palestinian employees, who demanded better pay and working conditions, in addition to services that are not stripped to the bare bone for the refugees. Further disruptions in UNRWA's services will only hurt those that have already been the most victimised, the refugees themselves.

Unfortunately, after more than 50 years, there still appears to be no solution to the Palestinian refugee issue in sight. Israel, in a familiar reaction, yesterday criticised a U.N. resolution recognising the concept of the refugees' right to return, doing its part to consigning yet another generation of Palestinians to the miserable reality of refugee camps scattered across the Middle East. Besides the states that host the refugees, UNRWA is one of their few reliable sources of assistance. The international community needs to accept its responsibility, financial and political, to ensuring that the agency can continue its mission until no longer needed.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Fahed Fanek said there is a difference between investing in health and investing in the Ministry of Health. In a Shoman Foundation workshop on health, former health ministers revealed that 85 per cent of the ministry's budget go to hospitals, part which the private sector can manage, while 15 per cent are spent on other health-related issues, such as food and medical monitoring, said Fanek. Fanek quoted former Health Minister Nayel Ajlouni as saying that the ministry's treatment system is inadequate, because of high cost, and the difficulty of evaluating it. Thus, restructuring the health sector is a medical and economic need, according to the writer, who added that of course this is not the same as preventing the poor from receiving free or semi-free treatment as half the ministry's allocation would be enough to pay for that.

Al Dustour's editorial commented on the government's tour of the Kingdom's governorates. The Cabinet set up a comprehensive plan to meet citizens to examine their needs and ambitions, the editorial said. With this move, the government is implementing its Letter of Designation to provide social and economic development to underprivileged areas, added the editorial. The tour coincides with His Majesty King Abdullah's own direct contacts and dialogue with people, said the paper. Such attitudes, which was established by the late King Hussein, will create greater transparency and strengthen confidence between the leadership and people. The newspaper, which lauded the tour, urged the government to continue the dialogue to include all society's institutions.

Peace, Israel and the fickleness of democracy

View from
 Academia



Dr. Ahmad Y. Majdoubeh

what a farce. You can laugh at the situation, if you are a spectator. It is tragic, if you are deeply involved. Which is the case for most of us, naive peace advocates.

What aggravates the situation is that Israeli elections happen all too often. They happen so often in fact that it looks like the Israelis hold an election every two weeks.

At one level, this is the sad story of democracy in general. Democracy, you see, has many virtues. But it also has its vices. One of its vices is inconsistency, disruption, lack of continuity in a

word, fickleness.

The behaviour of the same person you negotiated with in the short period of time when there were no elections changes a 180 degrees when elections approach. Out of a sudden, the tone changes, words change, and acts change. Action turns into inaction; lambs turn into wolves and doves into hawks.

This is the story of Arab-Israeli peace negotiations throughout the past three decades. In the meantime, precious time is wasted, opportunities are lost, and the region stands still. Think of what might have happened had peace materialised.

A great deal of the slow progress (some may call it failure) of peacemaking and peace-building in the Middle East is attributable to the fickleness inherent in the peculiar nature of Israeli democracy, and to the nasty spell the electorate has on Israeli politicians. Unless a miracle happens (or a great act of courage) peacemaking and peace-building in the Middle East will continue to be what they have been for a long time: slow, agonising, fragile, fickle and perhaps far-fetched.

Netanyahu and the Orient House

Jerusalem Life



Daoud Kuttab

WHEN THE MADRID Peace talks began in 1991, Benjamin Netanyahu was the spokesman of the Israeli delegation which was headed at the time by Yitzhak Shamir. Netanyahu's counterpart at the Madrid talks, Hanan Ashrawi, was representing the Palestinian peace talks team headed by Faisal Husseini.

At that time, the Palestinian delegation set out to Madrid from the Orient House in East Jerusalem which had become the headquarters of the Palestinian struggle for freedom and independence during the Palestinian Intifada.

It was also atop the Orient House building where the first Palestinian flag was ceremonially raised on the 13th of September 1993 as Palestinian President Yasser Arafat was shaking hands with the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Since the days of the Intifada until now, Israeli leaders of various persuasions have attempted, without success, to close down this building that represents Palestinian national aspirations. The U.S. government committed in writing that all Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem that existed when the peace process began will continue to operate. To clarify things and to avoid any misunderstandings the Orient House became the headquarters of the PLO and was charged with coordinating the permanent status talks which were to have started three years ago and which the Israelis were committed to complete by May 4, 1999. The permanent status talks, which are part of an internationally binding agreement are to include five issues among them the issue of borders, settlements and Jerusalem.

To avoid any possible friction with the Israeli governments, Faisal Husseini, now a declared member of the PLO's executive committee refused to become a member of the cabinet of the Palestinian National Authority. The Orient House, therefore, became officially connected to

the PLO which is the Israeli government's counterpart in the Oslo Agreements and not the PNA.

The recent decision by the Netanyahu government to close down three offices in the Orient House seem quite clearly connected to the Israeli elections.

It looks like a desperate move by a bankrupt politician who is afraid of losing the election. During the last election, the same Netanyahu charged that his opponent Shimon Peres would divide Jerusalem and he, Netanyahu, vowed that if he won the elections he would close down the Orient House.

Netanyahu's desperate move was coupled with a tragicomic set of reasons behind it. He charged that the Orient House is conducting foreign policy issues by meeting with diplomats there; that the offices that are to be closed are monitoring Israeli settlement activities and thus that the Palestinian headquarters is conducting illegal political activities.

Nabeh Aweidah, the spokesman of the Orient House, rejects the Israeli claims which he insists are no more than an election ploy. "Faisal Husseini has been meeting foreign diplomats since the days of U.S. secretaries of state George Shultz and James Baker," he said. As to monitoring the settlement activity Aweidah told me that this activity has two reasons. "As part of the public service we are providing to the people of Jerusalem, we are monitoring the settlement activities which has a direct bearing on the lives of our people. Secondly, and as part of the preparations for the permanent status, we are preparing maps regarding the situation in Jerusalem and the rest of the Palestinian areas." He reminded me that in the permanent status talks both the issues of Jerusalem and settlements will be discussed.

For the Palestinian spokesman, the best response to Netanyahu's accusations against the Orient House came

from Israeli Attorney General Elyakim Rubenstein. Aweidah quoted the top Israeli prosecutor, who headed the Israeli negotiations with the Jordanian-Palestinian delegation in Madrid as saying that the closure order is a political issue and not a legal issue.

Politically speaking, the connection between the Israeli elections, the May 4th deadline of the permanent status talks and the moves against Orient House can't be ignored. Last month, the heads of the European Union issued the Berlin Declaration vowing support for the establishment of a Palestinian state within a year. This week, U.S. President Bill Clinton sent a letter to Yasser Arafat supporting the rights of Palestinians to live for ever in freedom in their own land and committing to support the completion of permanent status talks within a year. The 56 heads of state which Arafat met in recent weeks told him they will recognise a Palestinian state once it is declared. Speaking in one of his election rallies, Netanyahu boasted that there will not be a Palestinian state as long as he is prime minister of Israel. A Palestinian state will surely exist within the legal time limit of the next Israeli government.

The only question that remains is whether Netanyahu will be the prime minister or not.

Dry Bones



Letters to the editor

An excellent paper

JUST A quick note of appreciation. I was given a copy [of the JT] on the flight back to London. I was impressed by the scope, content and analysis of the features. Frankly, where I find the English press trivialise and personalise most issues, it was good to see such high quality coverage, which gave me added appreciation of issues which I would never have seen here. Thank you for an excellent paper.

Dave Pearce
 U.K.

The Jordan Times welcomes letters and contributions from its readers on any issue they wish to tackle. Letters intended for publication should contain the writer's full name and preferably address as well. Names can be withheld upon request but only under special circumstances. Letters are subject to editing and abridging.

Healthier Jordanians, unhealthy health sector

JORDANIANS TODAY enjoy better health than ever. Life expectancy is rising, now at 66 for men and 70 for women; various diseases have been eradicated, including polio, which has happily not made an appearance in Jordan for the past 4 years; and physical access to health services is good, with 67 per cent of all households having a physician, health centre or hospital within a couple of minutes driving distance from home.

However, Jordan, like some other countries in the Middle East is working with increasingly scarce financial resources per capita to try to secure even better access to quality health care for citizens. So even though Jordanians are getting healthier, the country's medical care sector may not necessarily be so fortunate. There is an oversupply of doctors in Amman, and of private hospital beds (the rate of occupancy of which is only around fifty per cent). At the same time, poverty in rural areas and the concentration of medical facilities in the cities means that in some cases those needing health care are not getting it.

Geography isn't the only obstacle to better access to services however, and poverty is a growing problem. Half of Jordanian households have an annual income of less than approximately JD2,000, and around twenty per cent are

poverty-stricken. (The absolute poverty level is defined as an income only providing for the minimum amount of food, shelter, clothing, transportation, and primary health services for a family.) In this context of higher aspirations and growing problems, health insurance is increasingly becoming an issue. True, this topic can be problematic even in rich countries, with the American media for example rife with stories about the headaches of health care finance. The problem in Jordan, however, as in many other parts of the Middle East, is to reconcile rising health care expectations with falling incomes.

Separate government medical insurance schemes in Jordan apply to the military and other state employees and their families. Protection is thus extended to many who could otherwise not afford it, including most of the fifty-five per cent of Jordanians who are covered by health insurance. Much of the rest of the population that isn't relies on other means. These include help from UNRWA, charity from NGOs, and the largesse of affluent individuals, usually members of the extended family or clan of the uninsured person seeking medical attention.

This is obviously not ideal, and the result is sometimes a partial lack of medical care. Nevertheless, people get by in the

richer areas of Jordan, arranging for health care needs somehow.

What about the poorer parts of the country, especially the south? Defined as everything beyond Madaba, the Jordanian south is the most disadvantaged part of the country. The health situation remains poor in parts of the south. Infant mortality is around double the rate for the whole of Jordan, and generally people in the south do not have the ready geographical access to health services enjoyed by other Jordanians. For decades, the region did not receive enough attention from governments or NGOs. While other areas prospered, the south lagged; and when the national economy as a whole went into a nose-dive, the south suffered more than most. (That the economic disturbances of 1989 and 1996 began in the south is probably no accident.)

Over the past decade or so, the government and NGOs started to realise that there was a need to work harder in the region. Accordingly, more development funds started to be made available to the south. However, these efforts were apparently too weak and uncoordinated to stem the major riots that took place in parts of the region twice over the past ten years, and until today, many of the villages there do not even have adequate roads, sufficient electricity supplies, enough phones,

Developing World



Riad al Khouri

decent public schools, etc. Water supply is a matter of particular concern for people in rural areas of the south.

The region still suffers from poverty far exceeding the national rate. The extent of absolute poverty in the south has been estimated at around 25 per cent above the national average. The highest level of abject poverty (income only providing for the minimum amount of food for a family) in Jordan during the current decade was also registered in parts of the south.

However, the health insurance situation is better in parts of the south than in the country as a whole. For example, medical cover in the Karak Governorate reaches 72 per cent of the population. Many of the rest of the people there rely on charity and the

support of relatives to help meet heavy medical bills, but with increasing NGO activity in the south and a tribal system there that is stronger than in other parts of Jordan, care is forthcoming for most of the uncovered population in the Karak area. On the other hand, though borrowing from the extended family has traditionally been a way to make ends meet, this has resulted in a debt build-up. Some people are thus sinking further into penury as relatives continue to borrow with no resources for repaying loans.

The way out of course is for such informal mechanisms for assuring health care to be replaced by universal medical coverage for all Jordanians. Not that such insurance is going to be easy or painless to set up. Whatever else the current government may have done, it is talking a lot about this issue. With another long hot summer coming up and the economy yawning in near-zero growth, it would be nice to see some practical steps towards such enhanced social services. On the other hand, how are these going to be financed if the economy is not picking up? The answer is that the present mechanisms could be made a lot more efficient and that partial measures could be taken while we wait for better days and a soaring GDP that will make such insurance an affordable reality.

NATO resorts to war by proxy

By Robert Fisk

"THEY PUT THEIR trust in us and we can't let them down," President Bill Clinton told the American people less than four weeks ago.

Just two weeks later, General Wesley Clark pulled the rug from Clinton's promise to the Kosovo Albanians. NATO's air campaign, he declared, "couldn't stop ethnic cleansing." A few days later, Air Chief Marshal Sir John Day told us, with breathtaking lack of precision, that "this campaign has some way to go." Surely we didn't believe, NATO's spokesman James Shea admonished journalists in Brussels, that this was going to be over in just a few days?

Well, they didn't tell us that four weeks ago, did they? Back then, we were informed that although President Slobodan Milosevic's vicious security police were expelling tens of thousands of Kosovo Albanians wholesale from their homes, it would have been "even worse" if NATO hadn't bombed Yugoslavia. And now we must forget — or ignore — the terrible statistics of death: 2,000 Kosovo Albanians killed in the 12 months up to the start of the NATO bombardment; 3,200 in the past month alone.

And now the whole policy is being subtly shifted once again. We cannot stop Milosevic's "ethnic cleansing," but at least he can't do it "with impunity." Half his MIGs have been destroyed, and 100 per cent of his oil-refining capacity (or so we are told). "We are knocking the stuffing out of Milosevic," Shea proclaims.

So that is what the NATO mission has become — a punishment campaign. Goodbye autonomy for the Kosovo Albanians. Goodbye Rambouillet. Goodbye NATO protection. Goodbye the dream of independence. No wonder the Serbs believe they are winning. On Belgrade TV, the crude, almost pornographic anti-NATO documentaries are achieving their effect.

Wrecked hospital wards and screaming civilians are spliced into authentic colour footage of Hitler at Berchtesgaden. Eva Braun jokes with the Führer. "Monica," shouts a voice. And an unseen audience roars with laughter. A skull glows red-hot and the words "NATO U BLATU" appear on the screen — NATO into the mud.

Rubbish, of course. But then I remember the skull of the Kosovo Albanian refugee smouldering in the back of a tractor trailer bombed by U.S. F-16s in southern Kosovo, with its white teeth, and the backbone and just one fleshy leg hanging over the back of the truck. NATO didn't confess to that until we found the codings on shrapnel from the American bombs. And the 14-year-old boy dying in the Belgrade hospital with half his stomach torn out by a NATO bomb in Pristina; and the young woman cancer patient who asked me how I'd feel if my neck had been cut open by a NATO bomb blast the day after a tumour operation. Or the old woman dragged from the NATO-bombed train at Gredelica, who said that the carriage roof had crushed her face and blinded her for life.

I doubt very much whether these scenes are going to force the Serb people to undertake the "democratic transition" in Serbia that President Clinton fondly requested this week. And you can see, living among the Serbs as I have been doing this past month, how this insidious propaganda works. They are not told of the "ethnic cleansing" of Kosovo. They do not see the tens of thousands of Kosovo Albanians, or hear their stories of terror.

"There are some primitive people down there who are doing terrible things," an elderly Serb lady admitted to me over lunch the other day. "The Serbs will pay the price for this."

But "paying the price" — punishment — is part of the Serb theme of victimhood. If the Serbs are doing bad things, goes the refrain, it is because of what has been done to them. And the Albanians are to blame. Over and over again here, I am having the same kind of awful conversations with Serbs that I have had with Israelis. Serbia cannot afford to be overrun, to lose its Jerusalem in Kosovo. If injustice has been done to the Albanians/Palestinians, it is because the Serbs/Israelis must never allow themselves to be crushed and persecuted again. And how can the Serbs/Israelis deal with Albanian/Palestinian "terrorism" except with terror and retaliation?

There is, indeed, an awful parallel between the dispossession of the Palestinians, the massacre, at Deir



A Kosovo Albanian boy gives some bread to his exhausted grandfather, yesterday, shortly after arriving at Morina border checkpoint. Several thousand more Kosovo Albanian refugees arrived here alleging Serbian atrocities. The exhausted refugees, from the Gjakove region, claimed that Serbs had killed more than 100 people (AFP photo).

Yassin, the destruction of Palestinian villages in 1948 and the Serb slaughters in Kosovo and the destruction of Albanian villages.

No wonder Ariel Sharon — of Sabra-Chatila fame — was quick to see the parallels, arguing that autonomy for the Kosovo Albanians might lead to a demand for autonomy or independence from Israeli Arabs, and that an autonomous Kosovo might become "a centre of Islamic terror." But the parallels do not end there. Nor does hypocrisy.

Listen now to President Clinton, speaking a couple of weeks ago about the Kosovo Albanians.

"We... can't forget about their rights to go home," he said. "The refugees belong in their own homes in their own land... [they have] the right to

return."

But isn't that exactly — the very words — what every Palestinian has been demanding since 1948? Isn't that what every surviving Palestinian in Sabra and Chatila wants? The words "right of return" are inscribed on every Palestinian refugee's heart, printed in every Arab document on Palestinian dispossession. For Pristina, read Haifa. And when, back in the Cold War, the Soviets realised that they could not commit ground troops to fight for the Palestinians, they supported their guerrillas, and funded and armed the rebel movements of the Palestinian diaspora.

And that is exactly what the U.S. and NATO — too frightened to commit their soldiers to a land campaign — are doing now with the Kosovo

Liberation Army (KLA). The KLA are being given weapons, trained — by Americans in Albania — and supported by NATO. Just as Soviet leaders would once shake the hands of Nayef Hawameh and George Habash and Yasser Arafat (in his previous incarnation), so Madeleine Albright can shake the hand of Hashem "the Snake" Thaqi of the KLA. Just as Soviet military commanders once praised the guerrilla attacks of the PLO on Israel, so now British officers in Brussels and London and the Pentagon's spokesman Ken Bacon in Washington praise the KLA's attacks in Kosovo. I must admit that I never thought I'd see the day when an RAF Air Commodore (the hopeless Wilby in Brussels) would be pontificating about how the KLA was "regrouping

to fight on in Kosovo.

For the KLA are clearly to be NATO's foot soldiers. It is impossible — indeed, inconceivable — that the CIA are not involved in training the KLA. And the KLA are not just attacking Serb special security police and Yugoslav soldiers — a perfectly orthodox method of guerrilla fighting — but Serb civilians as well.

Who killed the Serb mayor of Kosovo Polje, just before the NATO bombardment? Who burned down the Serb villages outside Brezovica? No, what the KLA have done is on nothing like the scale of Serb atrocities in Kosovo. No, the KLA is not held responsible for mass rape or executions. But there are no rules in the Kosovo war and the KLA is now NATO's — our — representative in the Serb province. With the KLA using NATO as air cover and claiming to represent the Kosovo Albanian people — and with NATO openly acknowledging its alliance with the KLA — is it any wonder that the Serbs have decided to drive every Albanian from the province, on the grounds that every village is now aligned with the NATO powers that are bombing Serbia?

Not what we expected when we signed the Rambouillet accord back in March, is it? Not what the Kosovo Albanians thought, either. And not quite what our leaders told us to expect when they went to war. We're going to see more NATO support for the KLA in the coming days and weeks and months. No one will mention the Contras, of course, or the Bay of Pigs. We can bomb from Aviano in Italy, feel good about hurting Serbs and then go home and leave the Kosovo Albanians to their own devices.

That was pretty much the message on a bomb dropped near the village of Ribnica, close to Vranje in southern Serbia, last week, in a raid that injured two civilians. A hand-written message on the bomb casing read: "Bad times. Isn't it lovely? See you guys. I'm going home. Eric N. Italy."

Eric, I fear, represents all of us. And in case NATO claims that he doesn't exist, Shea may like to check the munitions code found by the Yugoslav news agency Tanjug: 30003 70 4 AS 4829 MFP 96214.

— The Independent

Dry Bones

N FREED M FROM PONS TIONS.

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NOW MAKING MISES RAFAT

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Internet, e-mail everywhere

By Jean-Claude Elias

THE "INTERNET +E-MAIL" phenomenon has swept away all other computer applications. It is now, by far, the first reason why people are buying new PCs. In some cases it is the only reason. No other computer topic is making the human race talk so much. If there's a TV programme on PCs, it's Internet seven times out of ten. At the last American Computer Show in Amman a large number of exhibitors were ISPs (Internet Service Providers).

The tidal wave is of dimensions unheard of in the field of personal computing. To extend the service to those who do not have a PC at home a large number and variety of public places are offering the service on a pay-per-use or even on a free-of-charge basis. Universities, cultural centres and Internet cafes are perhaps the most popular and practical ones. Restaurants and hotels are also following the trend albeit at a slower pace. In Jordan, the number of I-Cafes is estimated at 35 in Amman alone and about 10 in Irbid.

The need to give access to the Web almost everywhere has led one manufacturer of portable phones to design a model that allows mobile access to the network. It was already available about 18 months ago but the new model is at a much more reasonable price. Check your e-mail in your car, while travelling, on top of a palm tree or by the pool.

Browse any Web site anywhere in the world without being connected to anything — no power cable, no telephone cable, nothing. It took almost a century for the telephone to become portable for the masses. It took less than a decade for the Internet to do the same. One must admit that both technologies are somewhat linked and that the development of the first largely contributed to making the second completely wireless, truly personal and absolutely portable — it fits in the palm of your hand.

To what extent shall the Internet be omnipresent? Will it make sense for example to have wristwatches that can also do the job? Or maybe one of these amazing, pocket-sized Swiss knives? Will Internet come built into the car of the future just like a stereo system is now? It could that all this will soon happen. In another development, if connection prices continue to drop, we may have uninterrupted access to the Web. We may find it normal to connect in the morning, remain on-line till bedtime, and only sit before the computer (or look at our portable phone, our wristwatch or our Swiss knife) whenever we want or need to.

The only certainty is the growing need for access. Some businesses have become so dependent on the Internet that they often take subscriptions with more than just one ISP. To reduce downtime, whenever one ISP is not available — for one reason or another — they try connecting through the other(s). Whatever the cost of multiple subscriptions it seems more than justified in some cases.

It won't be long before we hear someone saying something like "I can't tell what time it is anymore, my Web-connected wristwatch has been infected by a nasty virus and one of the hands is completely frozen."

Jean-Claude Elias can be reached by e-mail at jean-claude@nets.com.jo



Chernobyl virus strikes hard in Asia, Middle East

By Chris Allbritton
Associated Press

PROVING MORE destructive than expected, the Chernobyl virus caused hundreds of thousands of computer meltdowns around the world — with Turkey and South Korea hit the hardest.

The unusually destructive virus — timed to strike on April 26, the 13th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster — tries to erase a computer's hard drive and write gibberish into its system settings to prevent the machine from being restarted.

While experts were still tallying numbers Tuesday, Turkey and South Korea each reported 300,000 computers damaged, and there were more elsewhere in Asia and the Middle East. Officials said warnings there weren't heeded.

"Arguably, this is the most malicious computer virus," said Dan Schrader, director of product marketing at Trend Micro Inc., which manufactures antivirus software.

Other experts disagreed over whether it was the most destructive virus ever. But many were caught off guard by the amount of damage and said it was much worse than the Melissa virus early this month. Before Chernobyl hit, several experts were quoted as saying they didn't

expect it to cause much trouble.

Experts credited widespread warnings and updated antivirus programmes with helping avert problems in the corporate world.

Home users were hit harder.

Fewer than 10,000 out of 50 million computers in the United States were hit Monday by the virus, said Roger Thompson of the International Computer Security Association.

The virus is believed to have originated in Taiwan and attacks Windows 95 and Windows 98 computers.

A specialist in the computer crimes division of Taiwan's Criminal Investigation Bureau said Wednesday that the bureau was still investigating.

"There are appearances it may have started in Taiwan, but we can't say for sure yet," the specialist said, declining to be identified.

The virus quickly spread after a company unknowingly distributed software infected with the virus over the Internet.

When the software was downloaded, computer users infected other files on their hard drive. If an infected programme was sent in an e-mail, the virus was passed on to the recipient.

"Turkey was caught unprepared," said Mustafa Ucoklar, an electronics engineer in

Turkey, where the virus infected computers at banks, an airport and state-run radio and TV stations, according to Turkey's Radikal newspaper.

"The warnings were there, but nobody took any notice of them," South Korean officials also reported about 300,000 computers were hit in government offices, schools and businesses — about 4 per cent of the nation's computers — in the worst attack of its kind in the country.

"We have been careless and lacked an understanding of this virus," said Ahn Byung-Yop, vice minister of information and communications. "We need to strengthen our alert system and public education on computer viruses."

Schrader said the countries hardest hit have widespread use of pirated software and lack recent virus software. Chernobyl's existence has been known since last summer, and every major antivirus software package can detect and protect against it.

Also, the Melissa virus last month served as a "very effective wakeup call" in the United States, Schrader said.

"Elsewhere it wasn't taken as seriously," he said.

In India, at least 10,000 computer owners reported being infected. Businesses, banks and publishing houses in India were shut down and

information worth millions of dollars was lost, the Indian Express newspaper reported.

Local media reported that up to 10 per cent of all computer users in the United Arab Emirates were affected; at least 10,000 computers were struck in Bangladesh; reports in China varied from 7,600 computers damaged to 100,000.

In the United States, students and home computer users who hadn't installed antivirus software were hit the hardest. About 100 Princeton students said their computers were wiped out just two weeks before term papers were due.

"The computers were affected to a point where the hard drives were rendered useless," said Princeton spokesman Justin Harmon.

Several hundred computers at Virginia Tech also were struck, destroying some hard drives, said Mike Moyer, a programmer in Tech's computer centre.

"We're going to be much more vehement about pushing the antivirus software this fall," Moyer said.

As of Tuesday afternoon, Bill Pollak of the Computer Emergency Response Team at Carnegie Mellon said 2,328 computers were reported damaged in the United States. Because there is no reporting requirement, the actual number could be higher.

NATO admits deadly civilian bombing; Draskovic sacked from government

(Continued from page 1)

Foreign ministry spokesman Nebojsa Vujecic told reporters during a visit to see NATO bomb damage in the southern town of Surdulica that Draskovic was expressing private views on Tuesday, Tanjug reported.

"We accept an international civilian and non-armed mission under United Nations protection and are prepared to adapt our forces to peaceful conditions," he said. "But before that the NATO forces located on our borders should be withdrawn."

Germany's defence minister and Greece's foreign minister led a procession of leaders to Russia, a traditional Yugoslav ally, to engage Moscow more deeply in peace efforts. United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan was flying there later. Annan on Wednesday cautioned against "unrealistic expectations."

In Surdulica, a huge crater was all that remained of one house, where locals said 16

people, mainly children and old people, had been sheltering in a basement when two NATO bombs hit on Tuesday. Officials said they had found 20 bodies so far.

Rescue workers combed the ruins, lit overnight with a spotlight — the only illumination in the little town apart from the hospital. Officials said phone lines and water were cut.

"One-third of the town was totally destroyed," said Surdulica's mayor, Miroslav Stojilkovic.

Reporters were shown two areas where there was widespread damage. A doctor at the local hospital said 11 people had been injured, two of them seriously.

NATO spokesman Jamie Shea told journalists at alliance headquarters in Brussels that the attack had destroyed an army training centre, considered by NATO to be a military target.

"During that attack, however, a precision guided weapon failed to guide accurately to its designated target and impacted some

200 to 300 metres beyond the barracks in a small residential area," Shea said, adding: "NATO has never, and will never, target civilians."

Yugoslavia says about 1,000 civilians, including many children, have been killed since NATO launched its air attacks.

Yugoslav Information Minister Milan Komnenic said the attack on Surdulica was a crime aimed at undermining efforts to bring about a peaceful solution involving the United Nations.

But he said it would not jeopardise Belgrade's commitment to a peaceful outcome.

Komnenic, a party colleague of Draskovic's, later quit along with two other ministers in response to the sacking.

NATO Secretary General Javier Solana earlier made clear there were no plans for a let-up in the military campaign. NATO said it had struck "a wide spectrum of targets" in Serbia and Kosovo on Tuesday night, the

35th night of air strikes.

In the port of Bar, a Reuters correspondent saw the Yugoslav armed forces open fire with anti-aircraft guns and rockets after unidentified planes, assumed to be NATO's, roared overhead.

The barrage, from naval boats in the Adriatic port and nearby guns, lasted at least half an hour.

NATO claimed the main Yugoslav port was crammed full of ships off-loading oil around the clock, but Bar was bare on Wednesday.

"As you can see there are just two ships in Bar today, loading wooden goods for export from Montenegro," said Dragan Niketic, who manages port handling services in the Adriatic port.

The refined-oil terminal stood still on the hillside above the empty dock.

Nor was there anywhere to hide the 10 tankers a day that NATO Supreme Commander General Wesley Clark said on Tuesday were part of a dash to supply Yugoslavia with fuel before the Western alliance tries to enforce a newly agreed oil embargo.

Eyewitnesses in the capital Podgorica said several explosions were heard there around noon GMT and a thick column of smoke had risen from the direction of the military airport.

Serbian media said seven missiles struck a military barracks early Wednesday in the Topcider residential district of Belgrade and houses in a major hospital complex nearby were damaged.

The barracks, one of the country's largest, were evacuated well before NATO strikes began. Its grounds are believed to contain an underground bunker that Milosevic often uses.

Residents of the capital's Dedinje district, where Milosevic and other senior officials live, said the huge blasts Wednesday shattered windows and moved furniture in their homes.

The worsening refugee crisis underscored the urgency of NATO's attempt to protect Kosovo's ethnic Albanians.

Up to 4,000 refugees arrived in Macedonia on Wednesday, where some 3,500 refugees had spent the night crumpled into a squalid holding camp at the main Blace border crossing (see story on page 5).

Macedonia said it would need \$485 million in foreign loans and grants to stave off economic and political collapse.

Albania, Europe's poorest country, said the flood of displaced people was costing it \$33 million a month.

Late on Tuesday, a new influx of several thousand refugees, overwhelmingly women and children, poured past the Albanian border post at Morina on tractors and cars, in cars or on foot.

Many of them said security forces had pulled out their menfolk near the village of Meje, and a number of refugees said separately they had seen bodies by the side of the road.

ban launch attack to recapture Bamiyan

Pakistan's Taliban fighters launched an attack on the strategic town of Bamiyan, a key stronghold of the Northern Alliance, on Friday. The Taliban fighters, who are fighting to recapture the north and west of the country, said they had captured the town and were moving on to the next target. The Northern Alliance, which is backed by the United States and other Western countries, said it was fighting back and would recapture the town. The fighting is part of a larger conflict in Afghanistan between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance.

complicates Taiwan's main air mock invasion exercises

than 1.6 million mainland can move to Hong Kong

Officers arrested, two plea guilty in brother's scandal

Officers arrested in Taiwan

Business & Finance

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Arab Life & Accident Insurance Company earns more premiums from Arab states

BY EXPANDING its operations in the Palestinian self-rule areas and improving the inflow of business from Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, the Arab Life & Accident Insurance Company succeeded in boosting the share of premiums coming from abroad from 12.5 per cent of the total premiums earned in 1997 to 19.8 per cent in 1998. According to the company's annual report, premiums earned from technical operations declined from JD8.6 million in 1997 to JD7.7 million last year.

Board Chairman Dirar Al Ghanem told the shareholders, who met in an ordinary session of the general assembly, that the company's activity last year was greatly affected by the woes of the Jordanian insurance market as a result of diversities in pricing risks. "Consequently, prices skidded to unbelievable levels that would affect the results of insurance firms for this year and coming ones," he stressed.

"In light of these conditions and circumstances, the management skills will be vital to employ the elements of technical competition, marketing and investments to achieve a balance between the interests of clients on the one hand and the shareholders on the other hand," the chairman. He indicated that, in this regard, the company will strive to implement a strategy that would comply with the present aspects of globalisation and market liberalisation before the end of this year.

The company's profit and loss statement at the end of last year showed a JD626,000 net profit, a 19 per cent decline from the JD744,000 net profit recorded at the end of 1997. The statement revealed that net profit generated by the various insurance departments of the company amounted to JD301,000 compared to JD471,000 in 1997. Income from investments was higher as it increased from JD272,000 to JD302,000 at the end of 1998. Retained earnings totalled JD21,000 (JD29,000 in 1997).

The balance sheet at the end of last year totalled JD11.96 million, two per cent higher than the total at the end of 1997. Of the total assets, JD5.4 were investments, mostly in shares of companies. Net shareholders' equity was higher as it totalled JD3.9 million (JD3.7 million in 1997).

The general assembly concluded its ordinary session by approving the distribution of dividends at a rate of seven per cent. Meeting in an extraordinary session, the shareholders approved the distribution of 13.6 per cent of the capital as free bonus shares in order to raise the company's capital to JD3 million. The bonus shares will be financed from retained earnings and voluntary reserves (Al Ra'i + Al Dustour + Al Arab Al Yawm + Al Aswaj).

A.S.E TRADE ACCESS 4646868

Company	Open	Close	Change
BANKS			
ARAB BK	208.000	209.500	+0.24%
NYL BK	1.320	1.340	+1.52%
MIDDLE EAST BK	0.920	0.910	-1.09%
THE HOUSING BK	2.650	2.630	-0.76%
JO. KUWAIT BK	1.690	1.600	-0.63%
JO. GULF BK	0.640	0.640	0.00%
JO. ISLAMIC BK	1.570	1.600	+1.91%
UNION BK	1.000	1.000	0.00%
SEI EL MAL	0.580	0.580	0.00%
PHILADELPHIA BK	0.540	0.550	+1.85%
BANKS INDEX	271.750		+0.18%
SERVICES			
ELECTRIC POWER	1.700	1.700	0.00%
JO. INTL. TRADING CENT	0.260	0.260	0.00%
UNIFIED LAND TRANS	1.070	1.080	+0.93%
SERVICES INDEX	105.930		-0.03%
INDUSTRY			
CEMENT	3.000	3.150	+5.00%
PHOSPHATE	2.340	2.280	-2.14%
PETROLEUM REFINERY	10.790	10.790	0.00%
THE IND. COMM. & AGRICU	1.080	1.130	+4.63%
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL	2.890	2.870	-0.69%
TOSACCO & CIGARET	1.330	1.340	+0.75%
PAPER & CARDBOARD	1.390	1.400	+0.72%
DAR AL DAWA	6.580	6.600	+0.30%
MIDDLE EAST COMPLEX	0.650	0.660	+1.54%
JO. STEEL	0.940	0.890	-5.32%
ARAB ALUMINIUM	1.820	1.840	+1.10%
UNIVERSAL CHEMICAL	1.170	1.190	+1.71%
NYL CABLE	0.490	0.490	0.00%
SUPPHO - CHEMICALS	0.360	0.360	0.00%
KAWTHER	0.570	0.570	0.00%
UNIVERSAL MODERN IND	0.570	0.570	0.00%
FOOD FACTORIES	1.000	1.000	0.00%
IND. RESOURCES	0.510	0.510	0.00%
NEW CAPLES	0.590	0.590	0.00%
NYL ALUMINIUM	0.710	0.720	+1.41%

Pressure rising on private sector to share costs of crises

WASHINGTON (AFP) — World financial leaders are increasing pressure on private lenders to bear a greater share of the costs of financial turmoil, but the bankers are warning that if the price is too high they could just stop lending altogether.

"The public is not going to put up with the idea of the international community putting up billions of dollars" of taxpayers' money "to bail out bankers," World Bank president James Wolfensohn said here Tuesday.

"There is no reason why one category of unsecured private creditors should be regarded as inherently privileged ... claims of bondholders should not be viewed as necessarily senior to claims of banks," Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin said earlier.

But Charles Dallara, head of the Institute of International Finance (IIF) grouping more than 300 private banks, warned that "seeking to extract specific forms and amounts of financial support from the private sector would be misguided" and could result in a drying up of credit altogether.

The threat to close the coffers to developing country borrowers is a powerful one given the huge amounts of private capital which flow from the industrial to the developing world every year.

In 1997, some private capital flows worldwide totalled \$300 billion, compared to \$40 billion in official development assistance.

It is a myth to think the

private sector escaped scot-free in the financial turmoil that began in Asia mid-1997. Dallara said in a letter to the International Monetary Fund's (IMF's) policy-making Interim Committee, which met here Tuesday to discuss better defence against crises.

The private sector lost some \$350 billion during the East Asian and Russian crises, and this was enough to have "brought home the costs of unsound lending decisions," Dallara said.

But a large part of those losses were incurred on stock market investment and currency dealings, not on bonds which are the focus of the current row.

The IIF is particularly concerned over pressure for private sector bondholders to reschedule their loans to countries in financial difficulty when an affected country seeks rescheduling of its public debt.

Hitherto, private bondholders have expected not only to receive a higher interest rate to compensate for the risk of lending to an emerging market, but also a virtual guarantee that paying them would take priority when money was tight.

This has raised the problem of so-called "moral hazard," where a country could be using rescue packages funded by public money from other countries to help finance its private debt servicing.

The system angers international financial leaders such as Wolfensohn who say the private lenders want to have their cake and eat it. "You cannot expect the international finance system to come in and bail out private

sector investments in a way that is superior to what happens to a bond contract in Atlanta," for example, where the U.S. Federal Reserve would never come in and bail them out. Wolfensohn said Tuesday.

The row erupted in February, when the Club of Paris creditor governments rescheduled Pakistan's debt but said the government should also reschedule private debt in the interests of fairness.

Dallara said this pressure was "ill-advised" because countries that rescheduled their bonds "are likely to jeopardize their access to new credit for some time."

He also warned that the reluctance to lend could extend to "more creditworthy borrowers that are ... seeking to renew flows of private capital."

Financial officials are also suggesting that bondholders should act together on dealing with any problem, as the Club of Paris does.

The creditor governments agree on a rescheduling package together so that all are equally privileged or penalised.

Any individual private bondholder can in theory sue if interest payments are not made or the bond is not redeemed on the due date — harming the image of the issuing country but only helping that single creditor.

Private lenders, however, are reluctant to lock themselves into a system where they could not do what they considered best for themselves without consulting with others and this too could lead to a drying up of credit, Dallara said.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR THURSDAY, APRIL 29, 1999

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Group efforts might be thwarted today, but you can find a way around the problem. You need to hold another meeting and get everybody talking with one another. The breakdown has something to do with money, most likely, as in, there's not quite enough of it to do what you want. But that's not a barrier. It's an opportunity to start getting creative.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) This would be an excellent day to join forces with a person who's powerful, charismatic, compassionate and action-oriented. You have a tendency to get stuck sometimes. You think about things too much, that's your problem. Today you need to team up with someone who will push you to take action.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) You could be sailing along today, thinking you're invincible, when whap! You run right into a problem you don't know how to solve. Actually, it's just time to get back to work. You're going to have to stop theorising and start putting your shoulder to the wheel. People are asking you to put up or shut up, but don't lose heart. If you don't know what to do, ask a friend who does.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) Reschedule your date for tomorrow night. Your place will be more the way you want it to be. That could be very nice indeed, if you decide to spend a romantic evening at home instead of going out and spending lots of money. You may not have lots of money by then anyway. Looks like you'll probably spend it fixing up your place.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) Looks like there could be a disruption at your house. Is somebody trying to teach you how to see from another point of view? Too bad. Your mind is already made up, and getting more so every minute. It's not a good evening to embrace a new idea anyway. You're better off sticking with your old ones. Schedule your mind-altering conversation for another time.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Some days you feel pretty smart, but today you may feel like a dummy for a while, because the problem you're up against is outside your area of expertise. The same sensation is felt by just about anyone who moves into unfamiliar territory. The way you handle the situation is what's important, and you'll probably just get to studying, which shows how smart you really are.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) Looks like you want to spend some serious money. You're scouting up to the idea, kind of checking things out. Shopping perhaps, looking for style and price and quality, all that sort of thing. Don't make your move quite yet, however. You need to do a little more research before you plunk your money down. The perfect thing may not show up until tomorrow or the next day.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) You're becoming a lot more powerful than you were before. You'll stop fiddling around with minute details and get into making something important happen. And you probably know just what, too. But, move slowly. You're going to run into a couple more details that need to be handled before you can go full speed ahead.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Looks like something you've been trying to learn is finally going to click into place. That doesn't necessarily mean things get easier. They could get more difficult for a while, as you start practising this new skill. Sometimes ignorance really is bliss, but you don't get to go there anymore. People know you're smart now, and they're giving you more to do. Might as well get used to it.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) You and your friends could decide to do something outrageous. It could be in a work setting, such as taking on a project bigger than anything you've ever tackled before. Or it could be personal, like the bunch of you going off to the Andes. The first consideration is finances. There's not enough money. Now that you know it, you know what you have to do first. Find the money!

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) Things continue to go your way as you breeze through life, with one minor little exception. Something that's going on at home, pertaining to your home or possibly real estate, is all messed up. You, who are so glorious, so wise, can't figure out how to solve this one silly little problem. You know what? You may have to call in an expert. Go ahead and do it.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) This would be a good day to put up provisions for the weekend. Have you got a pre-trip planned? If not, why not? Looks like there will be pretty good conditions for travel, although there are a few minor complications. If you do a little planning ahead, you can minimise those. Doing so is highly recommended.

Birthstone of April: Diamond — Amethyst

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR FRIDAY, APRIL 30, 1999

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Put that energy to good use today by finding more ways to make money. You may have to prime the pump a little by spending some money first. Get realistic about how much, however, before you write the check. Don't spend more than you can expect to make back in the next 13 years. Your lesson for the next few weeks in financial responsibility, remember?

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You may not know whether you're coming or going today. You're trying to be in two places at once. You may be able to do it with the help of another person. If you can get your friends to go here while you're going there, you'll have all your bases covered. That's the main objective. Besides, it's the only way you're going to win in this game.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) Not only is there a lot to do today, but you may also be getting some conflicting orders. One person wants you to do this, and another wants you to do that. And you may feel confused. Don't waste time running back and forth. Get them to make up their minds before you do anything at all. It's the only way you'll have a chance for success.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) You tend to fall for the strong, silent types, and that could happen again real soon. It looks like there's somebody like that in your immediate vicinity, who's so attractive you can barely resist. Unfortunately, it's hard for the two of you to find much time together. Your social lives are so busy, you may have to make an appointment for lunch, even if you've been married for years.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) Take it slow and easy today. Don't offer your opinion unless asked, and maybe not even then. Make them beg you for it, because anything less will be ineffective. People have really strong opinions of their own today. Most people have their minds already made up, so they're not listening very well. If that's the case where you are, save your breath.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Your ability to focus should be pretty good today, and that's important, because there will be lots of distractions. You won't be able to stick with one task all day, even though that's what you prefer. You'll be going back and forth, which makes efficiency difficult. That can be your excuse for not getting your main assignment

finished. **LIBRA:** (September 23 to October 22) Money is a major issue today. There's more coming in, of course, but a lot going out. You might be a little worried that there's not going to be enough to go around, and that worry appears to be based in reality. You can help yourself stay within your budget, however, by cutting down on some of the frills. Do that.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) You're looking very good, and that's important, because there are people you need to convince. Not everyone is on your side yet, but you can win them over. Listen patiently to their considerations, repeating them back if necessary. Then accept their best ideas and work those into your own plan. Before they even realise what's happening, you're managing the entire operation.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) If you can get into a routine, you'll find today's work goes easily. Otherwise, you're going to have a terrible time. Don't try to argue. Instead, figure out what's expected of you and make it happen. The person who's been leaning on you will back off, you'll get increased self-esteem, and possibly even a fatter paycheck. Don't just go along with the programme; lead it.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) You could get into a tug-of-war today. There are strong attractions drawing you in different directions. One is a gathering of friends you'd really like to attend, but the other is more personal, involving your children or the one you love best. The obvious solution is to bring them along, but that may not work. How about a get-together at your house tomorrow night, instead?

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) There ought to be a couple of interesting arguments going on today. They're interesting to you, but the other people might just find them frustrating. You have an objective point of view, or at least you think you do until you get sucked in. Stay analytical so you can be part of the solution instead of becoming part of the problem.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) You may get out of town this weekend. Conditions are almost right today, but not quite. It looks like work and some sort of personal obligation are in the way of travel, and you may also have a consideration about money. Well, holding onto your job will help with that, and the other conditions should clear up by tomorrow.

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Top Olympic man apologises for wrongdoings

SYDNEY (AFP) — Senior International Olympic Committee member Jacques Rogge apologised here Wednesday for the recent wrongdoings by some IOC members.

But he denied the Salt Lake City scandal was entirely to blame for Sydney losing AS\$50 million (\$32 million) in sponsorship money.

Rogge, head of the IOC panel monitoring Sydney's preparations for the 2000 Games, said he had had a frank meeting with Sydney Games sponsors.

"It was very useful, not always easy," he said.

But he denied the Olympic scandal would ultimately damage the Sydney Games.

Last week Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympics president Michael Knight said the scandals had caused

SOCOG to cut AS\$50 million from its sponsorship target.

But Rogge said the IOC could not be expected to make up the difference.

"I don't think at this stage the IOC should have to pay for the cuts," he said.

"It's not always a bad exercise to have a second look at the budget and cut away the fat," he added.

His comments brought a frown to the face of Knight who was in the news conference.

Rogge stuck doggedly to the official Olympic line that Sydney would be a huge success.

"The international ticket sales are outstanding," he said. "I think (Australian) people will scream for tickets."

Rogge, an IOC executive board member, warned when he visited Australia last October that Sydney

would have to sell a record 9.6 million tickets to raise AS\$600 million (\$378 million) to break even.

Seventy per cent of tickets will cost less than \$60 (\$37) but good seats for the popular events of athletics and swimming come in at \$445 (\$280).

Ten IOC members either resigned or were expelled for their roles in the Salt Lake City bribes for votes scandal and Rogge believed the reforms the IOC had put in place would restore the Olympic ideals.

"As a member of the IOC I have to apologise for the wrongdoings of a small minority," he said, adding that the IOC had a "collective responsibility" to respect its own rules.

"We betrayed athletes, sponsors, organisers and public opinion," he added.

Last October SOCOG

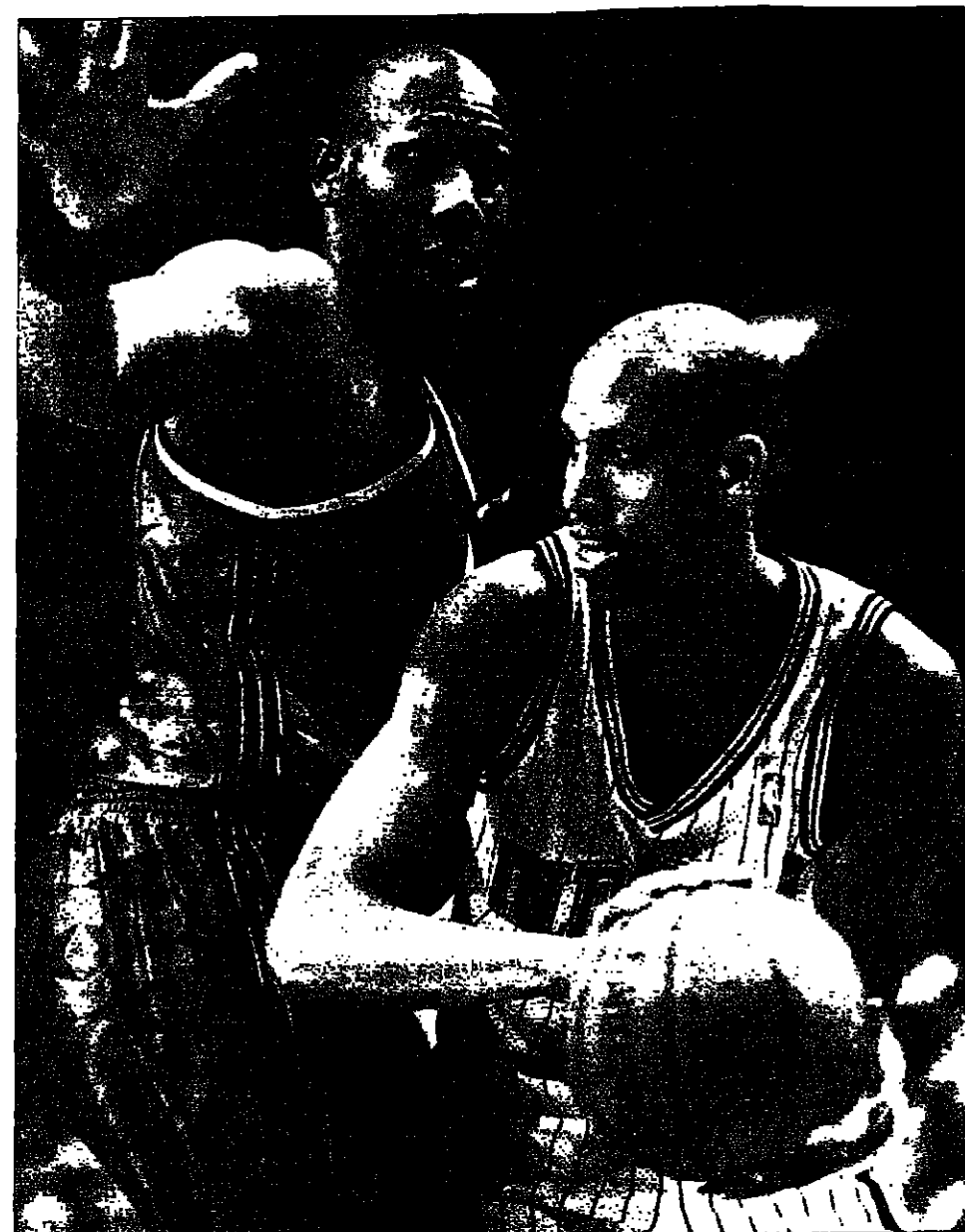
pared \$290 million (\$174 million), which included AS\$30 million (\$18 million) for Olympic family travel costs, from proposed overheads.

Then last week Sydney Olympic organisers cut the operating budget by AS\$75 million (\$48 million).

Knight said the sponsorship target had been cut by AS\$50 million to AS\$13 million dollars (\$513 million US).

And another AS\$25 million would be stripped from other budgets to boost the existing contingency fund to AS\$146 million dollars (\$92 million).

Knight said the cuts were a fraction of the AS\$2.6 billion dollar (\$1.6 billion) overall budget and he still believed they could leave a AS\$30 million (\$19 million) surplus to the New South Wales State which is underwriting the Games.



Indiana Pacers guard Reggie Miller (R) looks to pass the ball inside as Orlando Magic centre Issac Austin (L) defends during first quarter play at Market Square Arena in Indianapolis (AFP photo)

Arise Sir Alex?

LONDON (AFP) — Manchester United fans were told on Wednesday that manager Alex Ferguson could officially become 'Sir Alex' if the idea received their backing.

Ferguson has enjoyed unprecedented success at Old Trafford and is hoping to guide the club to a unique treble of European

Champions' Cup, Premiership title and the FA Cup this season.

That has led to suggestions in some quarters that the Scot should take his place alongside other knights like Sir Matt Busby and Sir Alf Ramsey.

According to the British government, Ferguson has a chance of receiving the prestigious award if fans join forces and vote for it under the new honours system.

Victory in the Champions' Cup final next month would certainly move Ferguson nearer a personal treble — he was awarded the OBE in 1985 and the CBE 10 years later.

"If Manchester United supporters wanted to vote en masse, they could do," a Downing Street spokesman said.

"The person needs to be nominated and anyone can nominate anyone. The honours system is open for absolutely anybody to nominate anyone for any honour they want to nominate them for."

"All they have to do is contact the Nominations Union for a form and the form is duly filled in by the person who wishes to nominate. It is quite straightforward."

"There are lots of people who are nominated and Mr Ferguson would have to be considered among the other nominations."

"We get thousands of nominations for the Queen's Birthday Honours and the New Year Honours."

All applications are judged by an honours panel whose composition is kept secret.



An Algerian handball player jumps in the air in bid to score a goal as two Greek players try to stop him during their game in Cairo. Egypt, Turkey, Greece and Algeria are taking part in a handball tournament in Cairo in preparation for the upcoming World Cup finals in June 1999 (AFP photo)

Morocco World Cup bid blow to Africa

RABAT (AFP) — Morocco officially confirmed its bid to host the 2006 World Cup, the country's news agency MAP said on Wednesday, in what will be widely seen as a blow to African football.

The Moroccan federation (FRMR) also officially received backing from the Moroccan government for their action.

The bid is likely to disappoint African officials in the other four interested countries of Egypt, Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa.

African Football Confederation (CAF) president Issa Hayatou from Cameroon has repeatedly appealed for a single African candidate without backing any country.

And just over a week ago, South Africa bid committee chief executive Danny Jordaan said it was imperative the continent only presented one candidate. Jordaan has also said Ghana have pulled out although official confirmation has not been received.

The withdrawal of Ghana would leave Brazil, Egypt, England, Germany, Morocco, Nigeria and South Africa battling to host the quadrennial showpiece of international football.

Sports ministers of the five African nations had been set to meet in South Africa next month.

World governing body FIFA will decide in March who hosts the 2006 event with president Sepp Blatter backing Africa provided it can match various cup requirements.

It is widely perceived that South Africa is the continent's best hope of staging the World Cup.

Hornets beat Raptors; Spurs lose

TORONTO (R) — The Charlotte Hornets remained in the thick of the Eastern Conference playoff race by dealing the Toronto Raptors a significant blow Tuesday in pursuit of their first post-season appearance.

Eddie Jones had 28 points and seven steals and David Wesley scored six points in a decisive fourth-quarter run as the Hornets posted a crucial 108-98 victory over Toronto.

The win moved the Hornets (23-22) within one game of eighth-place New York for the final playoff spot in the East.

The Raptors (22-23) slipped two games behind the Knicks. Both teams have five games remaining.

"We're working hard right now and praying that everything falls in place for us," Jones said. "You try and get a lead and make them play from behind. I have to be a leader on this team."

Not just me, but everyone at some point," Tracy McGrady scored 27 points for the Raptors.

In Boston, Grant Hill scored 10 of his 32 points in the fourth quarter as the Detroit Pistons rallied from a 16-point deficit for a 92-85 victory over the Boston Celtics.

Hill's jumper put Detroit ahead with three minutes remaining, 82-80, giving the Pistons' first lead since early in the first quarter. Jerome Williams added a layup and Jud Buechler hit a 3-pointer, extending the advantage to 87-80 with 1:34 left and capping a 30-7 run.

The Pistons tied Milwaukee for sixth place in the Eastern Conference and maintained a two-game edge over ninth-place Charlotte.

Tony Battie grabbed 13 rebounds for the Celtics.

In Dallas, Gary Trent scored 20 points to lead five players in double figures as the Dallas Mavericks posted

an 84-75 victory over the league-worst Vancouver Grizzlies.

Dallas, which led throughout the first three quarters, fell behind 64-63 on a slam by Michael Smith with 10:12 to play.

But the Mavericks outscored Vancouver, 21-11, the rest of the way for their fourth victory in six games.

In Indianapolis, with the Orlando Magic desperately needing a new winning combination, coach Chuck Daly went to a three-guard offence. Darrell Armstrong, the newest starter thanks to the change, helped make Daly look like a genius.

Armstrong buried an 18-footer with 1.6 seconds to play as the Magic halted a five-game losing streak and defeated one of their rivals for the Eastern Conference title with an 88-87 triumph over the Indiana Pacers.

Armstrong had 15 points and nine assists starting at the point as Penny Hardaway moved to shooting guard. Hardaway scored 17 points before struggling in the final minutes, when he missed two driving attempts.

At the Nets, Jamal Mashburn scored 10 of his 16 points in the first 4:58 as the Miami Heat made quick work of the New Jersey Nets, 95-76, despite playing without centre Alonzo Mourning.

Clarence Weatherspoon and Dan Majerle each added six points in the opening period as Miami shot a blistering 75 per cent (15-of-20) from the floor on the way to a 33-15 lead. New Jersey shot only 7-of-25 in the quarter and never recovered.

Miami has opened a two-game lead over Orlando for the Atlantic Division lead and the top seed in the Eastern Conference playoffs.

Miami coach Pat Riley moved into second place on

the all-time wins list with 945, passing Bill Fitch. Riley is 203 behind the leader, Atlanta Hawks coach Lenny Wilkens.

In Philadelphia, Allen Iverson scored 14 of his 31 points in the fourth quarter as the Philadelphia 76ers clamped down defensively and recorded their fifth straight victory, 80-71 over the undermanned Cleveland Cavaliers.

Iverson's 20-footer with 10:29 to play put Philadelphia ahead for good, 63-61.

He accounted for all of the Sixers' points in a 7-1 burst that extended the lead to 75-68 with 3:33 to go. Philadelphia held Cleveland to 3-of-16 shooting and nine points in the fourth quarter.

In Sacramento, rookie Jason Williams atoned for an awful effort in regulation play with an impressive display in overtime as the Sacramento Kings overcame the absence of Chris Webber and knocked off the San Antonio Spurs, 104-100.

Williams scored half of his 14 points in the extra session after connecting on just 2-of-14 from the field and committing five turnovers in regulation.

Vlade Divac collected 27 points and 15 rebounds for the Kings, who remained one-half game ahead of Seattle for the final Western Conference playoff spot.

In Seattle, in a battle of two of the NBA's top five scorers, Gary Payton won his duel with Karl Malone.

Payton scored 30 points as the Seattle SuperSonics nearly blew a 24-point lead but held on for a 90-85 triumph over the Utah Jazz, earning a split of their home-and-home series.

Malone finished with 29 points but Utah lost for the fourth time in six games. Malone entered the game third in the league in scoring at 23.3 points, while Payton was fifth at 22.0.

Anelka hits out at PSG

PARIS (AFP) — Nicolas Anelka, pleased with his English Young Player of the Year Award, hit out at Paris Saint Germain for not showing enough confidence in young players.

Anelka, let go by PSG for just five million francs (about \$810,000) in 1997 in a transfer coup by Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger, has since become France's number one striker.

"I am very happy to be recognised by the players," Anelka said, quoted in France's sports daily L'Equipe on Wednesday. "Even if I didn't think anything of it before, it's always

great to win such a trophy."

"I am now going to try to improve and win even bigger ones."

Anelka advised PSG to put more emphasis on cultivating their youth. The Parc des Princes side were European Cup Winners Cup champions in 1996 and runners-up a year later but have since plummeted to domestic mid-table obscurity.

Referring to his award, 20-year-old Anelka added: "This shows PSG that they have good youth players and they need to have confidence in them. I know there are others

who are going to leave."

"Kelban and Fernandez are not playing although they deserve to. If confidence isn't shown in them when things are not going well, it's because they are not respected."

"PSG have still not understood that young players can play in place of so-called stars. I like PSG but there are always strange things happening. Whenever a player arrives things go badly. It's completely the opposite at Marseille."

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Arens presses U.S. on south Lebanon, says one year not enough for talks

WASHINGTON (Agencies) — Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Arens pressed U.S. officials on an increase in alleged Syrian-backed attacks in southern Lebanon on Tuesday suggesting Syrian President Hafez Assad might need "shock treatment" to call them off.

"This is a powder keg and if you throw a lit match up there, it will go up and with it will go much of the hope that we have for a continuation of the peace process," Arens told a small group of reporters after meeting with senior U.S. officials.

"Hopefully, this is not something Assad is interested in, but he may need shock treatment or may need reinforcement of the message to spur him into some activity in this direction."

After meeting U.S. Defence Secretary William Cohen Tuesday on Lebanon Arens expressed the hope that Syria would respond to appeals to "put the lid on the situation."

"We're hopeful that maybe the Syrians will be receptive to messages that are being addressed to them that they better put a lid on what is happening and restrain the Hizbollah guerrillas," he said.

Also Wednesday, Arens poured cold water on hopes for rapid progress in Israeli-

Palestinian talks, saying he doubted a one-year period suggested by Washington was long enough.

He told the Washington Institute for Near East Policy that making peace in the Middle East would always be a slow process because of the gap in religion, culture and interests between Israel and its Arab neighbours.

U.S. President Bill Clinton, impatient with delays over the six months since Israel and the Palestinians signed the Wye agreement, proposed on Monday they aim to end talks on the core issues within a year, starting after Israeli elections in May.

"If we're going to be realistic, it's not going to be a very quick process. It's going to take considerable time," Arens told an audience of academics and policy makers.

"I saw that President Clinton talked about a year but I understand it was not called a target date," he added.

The minister's remarks contradicted those of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the U.S. State Department's assessment that the one-year period is adequate.

In separate discussions with U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and National Security Adviser

Sandy Berger, Arens also defended Israel from U.S. criticism that it was promoting new settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, thereby harming the Middle East peace process.

"There really haven't been any settlements established in the past few weeks, it's exactly the same number as it was five years ago or 10 years ago," he said after the Albright meeting.

"What we have had is during the past few weeks a sort of feverish activity among individuals going out on the hillsides... but actually they have created nothing of significance," he said, arguing that the government could not be held responsible for that and was trying to stop it.

However, he acknowledged that Albright did not appear sympathetic to his accounts and still considered that the settlement issue constituted unacceptable "unilateral acts" by Israel that endangered the peace process.

"After hearing my explanation, the secretary of state was still of the opinion that these are what she considers to be unilateral acts," Arens said.

Arens also discussed the situation in Jordan, the Middle East peace process, missile defence cooperation and Kosovo in his talks.



THE MASSAGE EXPERIENCE: A masseuse gives a man lying on his tricycle a back rub on the side of a street in Beijing on Wednesday. A massage costs 30 yuan (\$3.60) for a half-hour session and is popular with office workers on their lunch break (AFP photo)

Israel blasts U.N. vote on right of return for Palestinian refugees

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — Israel issued a stinging protest Wednesday over a U.N. resolution backing Palestinian self-determination, including in parts of present-day Israel, and the right of return for Palestinian refugees.

Israel lobbying failed to prevent the vote Tuesday at the U.N. Human Rights Commission in Geneva, where the United States was the only one of the 53 panel members to oppose the resolution.

Israel, which is not a member of the commission, expressed particular anger at the EU support for the document.

"Israel completely rejects the resolution taken by the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva yesterday," the ministry declared in a statement.

"Israel is disappointed by the

position of those countries, headed by the European Union (EU) which, while apparently supporting the Middle East peace process, pass a resolution that essentially stands in direct opposition to agreements between Israel and the Palestinians," it said.

"The current decision, and similar ill-considered statements, distance Europe from worthwhile and acceptable involvement in the peace process," it said.

The commission resolution backing Palestinian self-determination referred to two early U.N. resolutions, number 181 from 1947 which laid down an initial partition plan for then-British governed Palestine, and 194 calling for the right of return for Palestinian refugees to their homes.

The 1947 partition plan laid down borders for Israel which

did not embrace all of the territory later included in the Jewish state when it was formally proclaimed in 1948 following the first Arab-Israeli war.

Resolution 181 notably called for Jerusalem to be a "separate body" from both Israel and the territory offered to Arab Palestinians.

Israel claims that Resolution 181 is "null and void" because it was rejected at the time by the Arab World.

Wednesday's protest note complained that the Geneva document made no mention of the Mideast peace process launched in 1991 or U.N. resolutions 242 and 338 which call only for the exchange of territories occupied by Israel in 1967 in return for peace.

Israeli officials are alarmed by references to resolutions 181 and 194 because they fear

the Palestinians could try to use the rulings to shrink Israel to inside its 1967 borders and gain the right of up to three million Palestinians to return to homes inside Israel.

"This unilateral decision taken in Geneva can only weaken the Palestinian commitment to reach a peace settlement through direct negotiations" with Israel, the foreign ministry said.

Israel already clashed with the European Union last month after the EU referred to the 1947 U.N. partition plan in rejecting Israeli complaints about meetings between EU diplomats and Palestinian officials in Jerusalem.

EU ambassadors recalled that international law still recognised Jerusalem as the "separate body" foreseen in the U.N. plan.

Iranian ministry vows to back Tehran reformers

TEHRAN (AFP) — The tug-of-war between Iran's rival factions reached a new peak Wednesday as the reformist-led interior ministry vowed to ignore a move by parliament conservatives to disqualify five leading moderates in the capital.

The interior ministry insisted that all five of the reformist candidates whose disqualification had been ordered by the head of the conservative dominated election supervision council would be present at the first meeting of the capital's new city council on Thursday.

"All leading vote-getters will be present at the official opening session... [and] any attempt aimed at disturbing public opinion will not have the least effect," a ministry statement said.

The ministry said the disqualification of the five candidates was merely the "personal opinion" of the supervision council's chief, conservative MP Ali Movahedi Savaji, and reiterated that the deadline had passed for challenging the results of

February's municipal elections, the first in Iran's history.

The most prominent of the five reformers targeted, former Vice President and Interior Minister Abdullah Nouri, accused the election supervision committee of joining in a partisan campaign to undermine the reformist government of moderate President Mohammad Khatami.

The president's opponents were "trying to pressure the government through all the means at their disposal," Nouri told the official news agency IRNA.

The supervision council confirmed the disqualification of the five reformers on Tuesday, just two days ahead of the city council's opening session, and did not include them in a list of final elections results.

Nouri and two other candidates, reformist civil servants Ahmad Hakimi Pour and Mohammad Arifanfar, were barred on the grounds that they had failed to resign from their official positions as required before the election.

Iranian opposition party calls for direct talks with U.S.

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran's main liberal opposition party called Wednesday for the immediate opening of negotiations with the United States following U.S. President Bill Clinton's conciliatory remarks towards Tehran.

Iran's Freedom Movement, an Islamic liberal group with democratic views, called in a statement for "immediate straightforward official negotiations with the U.S."

"The current state of affairs in Iran as well as President Bill Clinton's unusual speech" make it necessary for Iran to hold such negotiations, it said.

The talks would "secure the interests of the Iranian people and resolve the differences between the two countries," the group said.

Clinton, in remarks two weeks ago, made an unusual overture toward the Islamic republic.

"Iran, because of its enormous geopolitical importance over time, has been the subject of quite a lot of abuse from various Western nations," Clinton said during a confer-

ence held in the United States.

Iran's Freedom Movement praised moderate President Mohammad Khatami's "détente politics" and said that "all final agreements reached [with the United States] can and must be confirmed by the parliament's vote."

The opposition group was founded in the 1960s by Mehdi Bazargan, head of the provisional government during the 1979 Islamic revolution, and is currently led by Ebrahim Yazdi, foreign minister of the provisional government.

Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi welcomed Clinton's remarks last week but stressed that a "diplomatic smile" was not enough and there must be a "change in behaviour."

Tehran and Washington broke off diplomatic ties following the hostage-taking at the U.S. embassy in Tehran by Iranian students shortly after the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Clinton's remarks have sparked heated debate in Iran.

Palestinian police shoot Israeli soldier in W. Bank

JENIN (AFP) — Palestinian police shot and wounded an Israeli soldier on Wednesday after he drove by mistake into a Palestinian-ruled village in the West Bank, Israeli officials said.

An Israeli army spokesman said the soldier drove into the village of Silat Al Harthiya in the northern West Bank by mistake and was fired upon by Palestinian police as he tried to drive back to Israeli-held territory.

"When the soldier discovered his error and tried to return to the main road police fired several shots at him," he said.

The 19-year-old soldier, who was in a civilian vehicle, suffered three bullet wounds in the shoulder and chest and was hospitalised in Israel in moderate condition, military sources said.

Palestinian officials said the soldier failed to stop at a Palestinian security checkpoint outside Silat Al Harthiya and that policemen fired into the air but not at his car as he drove away.

"The soldier's jeep approached the checkpoint outside the village and police ordered it to stop but it did not and they fired into the air," said Zuhair Manassra, governor of Jenin, the main Palestinian city in the area.

"We only heard later from the Israelis that the soldier had been wounded," he told AFP.

The Israeli army rejected the Palestinian version and accused the Palestinian police of firing irresponsibly.

Iraq kicks off Saddam's birthday celebrations

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Iraq's media kicked off the sanctions-hit state's birthday celebrations with a fanfare of congratulations on Wednesday as President Saddam turned 62.

State radio played endless songs to the glory of the Iraqi leader, including a repeated English-language version of "Happy Birthday to You," which was interrupted only by congratulatory messages from listeners.

Some callers improvised their own poems of praise to Saddam, who has led the country for 20 years.

"It is the birthday of goodness, love and joy," said a message broadcast on state radio and the youth radio station run by Saddam's eldest son, Uday.

Baghdad's newspapers marked the occasion with special editions filled

with dozens of photos of the president and interviews with people who have known him since his childhood.

"The birth of the leader Saddam marked a new era for Iraq and the Arab Nation," the Al Jumhuriya newspaper trumpeted on its front page.

"Thousands were born in Iraq and in the world on April 28, 1937, but only Saddam, who saw his first day in a village in Tikrit, became a symbol of humanity's fight for freedom, justice and progress," the ruling Baath Party's Al Thawra newspaper said.

The Al Ittihad daily, published by the economist's union, said "the Iraqi people chose their path under the leadership of Saddam and the aggressor's plots will not be able

to make them deviate from this."

"Iraq and Saddam are one and the same," the Babel newspaper declared this week as the festivities were launched amid great pomp.

Official celebrations to mark the Iraqi president's birthday have taken on gigantic proportions of the length and breadth of the country.

Iraq was to unveil a new \$10 million dam on one of the tributaries of the Tigris River in honour of its president. The Al Azim (Superb) dam was to be inaugurated at 5:00 p.m. (1300 GMT), Saddam's exact hour of birth.

Five new mosques were also to be opened in honour of the president and the foundation stone of a new mosque in the northern city of Mosul laid.

The president last year gave instructions for a new mosque to be built every year to mark his birthday.

The birthday bash has seen delegations pour in from abroad and thousands will be bused north 170 kilometres to Tikrit, the town near Saddam's birthplace, and traditional focus of the party.

Saddam first came to power in 1968 after overthrowing the government. He was the power behind the throne for a decade before ruling in his own right.

Today he is general secretary of the ruling Baath Party, leader of the revolutionary council and head of state. He also holds the titles of field marshal and commander of the army.



Election campaign turns off Israelis

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israel's extended election campaign has massively dampened the sexual appetite of its citizens, a top Israeli sex therapist told AFP. "Sexual activity among Israelis has declined by an average of 82 per cent since the government's collapse" last December, said Alexander Uchinsky, who runs a large clinic in Israel's biggest city. In a study, 12,000 of the clinic's patients all reported a strong sense of anxiety ahead of the May 17 general elections which they deemed "crucial." Uchinsky said. Patients reported a similar decline in sexual performance during the 1991 Gulf War and the 1998 World Cup in France.

Russian elephants get vodka ration

MOSCOW (AFP) — Elephants performing in a Russian circus touring Kazakhstan are each given a litre of vodka a day on the orders of a vet, the daily Segodnia quoted circus boss Alesei Kamilov as saying. Kamilov said the vet had recommended up to five litres of vodka per day for each animal, but this had been reduced to one litre for economy reasons. "In the old days, we gave brandy and French Cognac wine to our elephants, but we cannot afford that anymore," Kamilov said the animals were not fed neat vodka, but that their ration was diluted with five parts of water per litre. The circus boss said that the elephants had not become alcoholic. "They live for much longer in the circus than in the wild," Kamilov said.

Swordsmen enters Irish president's grounds

DUBLIN (R) — A sword-wielding man in an "intoxicated state" broke into the grounds of the Irish president's residence on Tuesday night, police said on Wednesday. Police said the man, whom they described as disoriented, was taken into custody and subsequently released without charge. Authorities are considering whether to press charges. President Mary McAleese and her family were at the residence in Dublin's sprawling Phoenix Park when the man entered the grounds but he did not reach the house, police say. His motives were unclear.

Danish parliament bans TV after stripper incident

COPENHAGEN (AFP) — Danish Parliament Speaker Ivar Hansen has banned television cameramen and photographers from the building after a licentious film was shot in the lobbies of the Folketing. The ban was ordered after a DR2 channel film showed a Social Democrat deputy licking salt from the breasts of a stripper, afterwards downing a glass of tequila. He later sucked at a slice of lemon which the woman was holding in her teeth. The scene purported to be a denunciation by the parliamentarian, Peder Sass, of drinking by young Danes. Hansen said that filming in parliament would henceforth be allowed only if there was a "natural link" with its political work.

Union finds Nightingale bad for nurses' image

LONDON (AP) — Florence Nightingale is not the right kind of hero for today's nurses and should be toppled from her place in the professional pantheon, a health worker's union has decided. Unison, a union representing more than 450,000 national health service staff, says "the lady of the lamp" was a well-to-do, white Protestant and an establishment model for nurses. "All over eastern Europe statues of Lenin are being taken off their pedestals, dismantled and pulled off to be cut up," said delegate Wendy Wheeler. "It is in the same vein that the nursing profession must, as we enter the new millennium, start to exorcise the myth of Florence Nightingale."

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